

POPULAR EDITION OF CAPTAIN MAYNE REID'S WORKS.



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THE WAR TRAIL; or, The Hunt of the Wild Horse.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID,

AUTHOR OF "THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN," "THE DEATH-SHOT," "THE SCALP HUNTERS," ETC., ETC.



IN ARRANGING MY LAZO, I HAD TAKEN MY EYES FROM THE CHASE, ONLY FOR A MOMENT; WHEN I LOOKED OUT AGAIN,
THE HORSE HAD DISAPPEARED!

The War Trail;

OR,

The Hunt of the Wild Horse.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID,
AUTHOR OF "THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN," "THE
RIFLE RANGERS," "THE WHITE CHIEF,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MEXICAN FRONTIER VILLAGE.

A MEXICAN *pueblita* on the banks of the Rio Bravo del Norte—a mere *rancheria*, or hamlet. The quaint old church of Morisco-Italian style, with its cupola of motley japan, the residence of the *cura*, and the house of the *alcalde*, are the only stone structures in the place. These constitute three sides of the plaza, a somewhat spacious square. The remaining side is taken up with shops or dwellings of the common people. They are built of large unburnt bricks (*adobes*), some of them washed with lime, others gaudily colored like the proscenium of a theater, but most of them uniform in their muddy and forbidden brown. All have heavy jail-like doors, and windows without glass or sash. The *reja* of iron bars, set vertically, opposes the burglar, not the weather.

The stone dwellings, and those of mud likewise, are flat-roofed, tiled or cemented—sometimes tastefully japanned—with a parapet breast high running round the edge. This flat roof is the *azotea*, characteristic of Mexican architecture.

When the sun is low and the evening cool, the *azotea* is a pleasant lounging-place, especially when the proprietor of the house has a taste for flowers; then it is converted into an aerial garden, and displays the rich flora for which the picture-land of Mexico is justly celebrated. It is just the place to enjoy a cigar, a glass of *pinole*, or, if you prefer it, *catalan*. The smoke is wafted away, and the open air gives a relish to the beverage. Besides, your eye is feasted; you enjoy the privacy of a drawing-room, while you command what is passing in the street. The slight parapet gives security, while hindering a too free view from below; you see, without being seen. The world moves on, busied with earthly affairs, and does not think of looking up.

I stand upon such an *azotea*; it is that over the house of the *alcalde*; and his being the tallest roof in the village, I command a view of all the others.

The center of the plaza presents a salient point in the picture. There the well (*el pozo*), with its gigantic wheel, its huge leathern belt and buckets, its trough of cemented stone-work, offers an Oriental aspect. Verily, it is the Persian wheel!

Gliding with silent step and dubious look—his wide *calzoneros* flapping around his ankles, his arms and shoulders shrouded in the mottled *serape*, his black broad-brimmed hat darkening still more his swarthy face—goes the *poblano*, the denizen of the adobe hut. He shuns the center of the plaza, keeping around the walls; but at intervals his eyes are turned toward the well with a look of mingled fierceness and fear.

Now and then a young girl, with red *olla* poised upon her crown, trips lightly across the plaza in the direction of the well. Perhaps she is a *poblana*—one of the belles of the village—in short-skirted, bright-colored petticoat, embroidered but sleeveless chemisette, with small satin slippers upon her feet; head, shoulders and bosom shrouded in the blue-gray *reboso*; arms and ankles bare. Several of these may be seen passing to and fro. They appear less uneasy than the men; they even smile at intervals, and reply to the rude badinage uttered in an unknown tongue by the odd-looking strangers around the well. The Mexican women are as courageous as they are amiable. As a race, their beauty is undeniable.

But who are these strangers? They do not belong to the place, that is evident; and equally so that they are objects of terror to those who do. At present they are masters here. Their numbers, their proud, confident swagger, and the bold, loud tone of their conversation, attest that they are masters of the ground. Who are they?

Odd-looking, I have styled them; and the phrase is to be taken in its full significance. A more odd-looking set of fellows never mustered in a Mexican plaza, nor elsewhere. There are fourscore of them; and but that each carries a yager rifle in his hand, a knife in his belt, and a Colt's pistol on his thigh, you could not discover the slightest point of resemblance between any two of them. Their arms are the only thing about them denoting uniformity, and some sort of organization: for the rest, they are as unlike one another as the various shapes and hues of coarse broadcloth, woollen jeans, cottonades, colored blankets and buckskin can make them. They wear caps of coon-skin and cat-skin, and squirrel; hats of beaver and felt, and glaze, of

wool and palmetto; of every imaginable shape and slouch. Even of the modern monster—the silken "tile"—samples might be seen, badly crushed. There are coats of broadcloth, few in number, and well worn; but many are the garments of "Kentucky jeans" of bluish-gray, of copper-colored nigger cloth, and sky-colored cottonade. Some wear coats made of green blankets, others of blue ones, and some of a scarlet red. There are hunting shirts of dressed deerskin, with plaited skirt, and cape, fringed and jauntily adorned with beads and embroidery—the favorite style of the backwoods hunter, but others there are of true Indian cut—open only at the throat, and hanging loose, or fastened around the waist with a belt—the same that secures the knife and pistol. There are cloth jackets too, such as are worn by sailors, and others of sky-blue cottonade—the costume of the Creole of Louisiana; some of red-brown leather—the *jaqueta* of the Spano-American; and still another fashion, the close-fitting embroidered "spencer" of the Mexican *ranchero*. Some shoulders are covered by *serapes*, and some by the more graceful and toga-like *manga*. Look lower down: examine the limbs of the men of this motley band; the covering of these is not less varied than their upper garments. You see wrappers of coarse cloth, of flannel, and of baize; they are blue, and scarlet, and green. You see leggings of raw hide and of buckskin; boots of horse-leather reaching to the thighs; "nigger boots" of still coarser fabric, with the pantaloons tucked under; brogans of unstained calf-skin, and moccasins of varied cut, betokening the fashion of more than one Indian tribe. You may see limbs incased in calzoneros, and others in the heavy stamped leather *botas* of the Mexican horseman, resembling the greaves of warriors of the olden time.

The heels of all are armed, though their armature is as varied as the costumes. There are spurs of silver and steel, some plated and some with the plating worn off; some strapped, and others screwed into the heel of the boot; some light, with small rowels and tiny teeth, while others are seen (the heavy spur of Mexico) of several pounds' weight, with rowels five inches in diameter, and teeth that might be dashed through the ribs of a horse!—cruel weapons of the Mexican *cavallero*.

But these spurs in the plaza, these *botas* and *calzoneros*, these *mangas* and *serapes*, are not worn by Mexicans. Their present wearers are men of a different race. Most of those tall stalwart bodies are the product of the maize-plant of Kentucky and Tennessee, or the buckwheat and "hog-meat" of the fertile flats of Ohio, Indiana and the Illinois. They are the squatters and hunters of the backwoods, the farmers of the great western slopes of the Alleghanies, the boatmen of the Mississippi, the pioneers of Arkansas and Missouri, the trappers of prairie-land, the *voyageurs* of the lake country, the young planters of the lower States, the French Creoles of Louisiana, the adventurous settlers of Texas, with here and there a gay city spark from the larger towns of the "great West." Yes, and from other sources are individuals of that mixed band. I recognize the Teutonic type—the fair hair and whitish-yellow mustache of the German, the florid Englishman, the staid Scot, and his contrast the noisy Hibernian; both equally brave. I behold the adroit and nimble Frenchman, full of laugh and chatter, the stanch soldierly Swiss, and the mustached exile of Poland, dark, somber, and silent. What a study for an ethnologist is that band of odd-looking men! Who are they?

You have thrice asked the question. I answer it: They are a corps of "Rangers"—the guerrilla of the American army.

And who am I? I am their captain—their chief.

Rude as is the *coup d'œil* of the corps, I am proud to say that a high sentiment of honor pervades it—higher than will be found in the picked *corps de garde* of an emperor. True, they appear rough and reckless—terrible, I might say; for most of them—with their long beards and hair, dust-begrimed faces, slouched hats, and odd habiliments, belted as they are with knife, pistol, powder-horn, and pouch—present such an aspect.

But you would wrong them to take them as they look. Few among them are the pure bandits whose aim is plunder. Many a noble heart beats beneath a rude exterior—many a one truly humane. There are hearts in that band that throb under the influence of patriotism; some are guided by a still nobler impulse, a desire to extend the area of freedom; others, it is true, yearn but for revenge. These last are chiefly Texans, who mourn a friend or brother slain by Mexican treachery. They have not forgotten the cowardly assassination of Goliad; they remember the red butchery of the Alamo.

The men have picketed their horses in the church inclosure; some are tied to trees, and others to the *rejabars* of the windows; like their riders, a motley group, various in size, color, and race. The strong high-mettled steed of Kentucky and Tennessee, the light "pacer" of Louisiana, the cob, the barb, his descendant the "mustang," that but a few weeks ago was running wild upon the prairies, may all be

seen in the troop. Mules, also, of two distinct races—the large gaunt mule of North America, and the smaller and more sprightly variety, native of the soil.

My own black steed, with his pretty fern-colored muzzle, stands near the fountain in the center of the plaza. My eye wanders with a sort of habitual delight over the oval outlines of his body. How proudly he curves his swan-like neck, and with mock anger paws up the dust! He knows that my eyes are upon him.

We have been scarcely an hour in the *rancheria*; we are perfect strangers to it; we are the first American troop its people have yet seen—although the war has been going on for some months further down the river. We have been dispatched upon scouting duty, with orders to scour the surrounding country as far as it is safe. The object in sending us hither is not so much to guard against a surprise from our Mexican foe, who is not upon this side, but to guard them, the Mexicans, from another enemy—an enemy of both of us—the Comanche! These Indian Ishmaelites, report says, are upon the "war-trail," and have quite an army in the field. It is said they are foraging higher up the river, where they have it all to themselves, and have just pillaged a settlement in that direction—butchered the men as is their wont, and carried off the women, children, and chattels. We came hither to conquer the Mexicans, but we must protect while conquering them. *Cosas de Mexico!*

CHAPTER II.

MAKING A CAPTIVE.

I WAS musing upon the singular character of this triangular war, when my reverie was disturbed by the hoof-strokes of a horse. The sounds came from a distance, outside the village; the strokes were those of a horse at full gallop.

I stepped hastily across the *azotea*, and looked over the parapet, in hopes of obtaining a view of this rapid rider. I was not disappointed—as I neared the wall, the road and the rider came full under my eyes.

In the latter I beheld a picturesque object. He appeared to be a very young man—a mere youth, without beard or mustache, but of singularly handsome features. The complexion was dark, almost brown; but even at the distance of two hundred yards, I could perceive the flash of a noble eye, and note a damask redness upon his cheeks. His shoulders were covered with a scarlet *manga*, that draped backward over the hips of his horse; and upon his head he wore a light *sombrero*, laced, banded, and tasseled with bullion of gold. The horse was a small but finely proportioned mustang—spotted like a jaguar upon a ground color of cream—a true Andalusian.

The horseman was advancing at a gallop, without fear of the ground before him: by chance, his eyes were raised to the level of the *azotea*, on which I stood; my uniform, and the sparkle of my accouterments, caught his glance; and quick as thought, as if by an involuntary movement, he reined up his mustang, until its ample tail lay clustered upon the dust of the road. It was then that I noted the singular appearance of both horse and rider.

Just at that moment, the ranger, who held picket on that side of the village, sprung forth from his hiding-place, and challenged the horseman to halt. The challenge was unheeded. Another jerk of the rein spun the mustang round, as upon a pivot; and the next instant, impelled by the spur, the animal resumed his gallop. He did not return by the road, but shot off in a new direction, nearly at right-angles to his former course. A rifle-bullet would have followed, and most likely have stopped the career of either horse or rider, had not I, just in the "nick" of time, shouted to the sentry to hold his fire.

A reflection had occurred to me: the game was too noble, too beautiful, to be butchered by a bullet; it was worth a chase and a capture.

My horse was by the water-trough. I had noticed that he was not yet unsaddled, and the bridle was still on. He had been warned by the morning's scout; and I had ordered my negro groom to walk him round for an hour or so before letting him at the water.

I did not wait to descend by the *escalera*; I sprung upon the parapet, and from that into the plaza. The groom, perceiving my intention, met me half-way with the horse.

My springing down from the roof and up into the saddle occupied scarcely two minutes' time; and in two more, I had cleared the houses, and was scouring across the fields after the scarlet horseman. He was evidently making to get round the village, and continue the journey our presence had so suddenly interrupted.

The chase led through a field of *milpas*. My horse sunk deeply in the loose earth, while the lighter mustang bounded over it like a hare. He was distancing me, and I began to fear I should lose him, when all at once I saw that his course was intercepted by a list of *maguays*, running transversely right and left. The plants were of luxuriant growth, eight or ten feet high, and placed alternately, so that their huge

hooked blades interlocked with each other, forming a natural *chevaux-de-frise*.

This barrier at first glance seemed impassable for either man or horse. It brought the Mexican to a halt. He was turning to skirt it, when he perceived that I had leaned into the diagonal line, and could not fail to head him. With a quick wrench upon the rein, he once more wheeled round, set his horse against the magneys, plied the spur, and dashed right into their midst. In a moment, both horse and rider were out of sight; but as I spurred up to the spot, I could hear the thick blades crackle under the hoofs of the mustang.

There was no time for reflection. I must either follow, or abandon the pursuit. The alternative was not thought of. I was on my honor, my steed upon his mettle; and without halt we went plunging through the magneys.

Torn and bleeding, we came out on the opposite side; and I perceived, to my satisfaction, that I had made better time than the red rider before me; his halt had lessened the distance between us.

But another field of milpas had to be passed, and he was again gaining upon me, as we galloped over the heavy ground.

When nearly through the field, I perceived something glancing before us; it was water—a wide drain or ditch, a *zequia* for irrigating the field. Like the magneys, it ran transversely to our course.

"That will stop him," thought I; "he must take to the right or left, and then—"

My thoughts were interrupted. Instead of turning either to right or left, the Mexican headed his horse at the *zequia*, and the noble creature rushing forward, rose like a bird upon the wing, and cleared the canal.

I had no time to expend in admiring the feat; I hastened to imitate it, and galloping forward, I set myself for the leap. My brave steed needed neither whip nor spur; he had seen the other leap the *zequia*, and he knew what was expected of him. With a bound he went over, clearing the drain by several feet; and then, as if resolved upon bringing the affair to an end, he laid his head forward, and stretched himself at race-course speed.

A broad grassy plain—a savanna—lay before us, and the hoofs of both horses, pursuer and pursued, now rung upon hard firm turf. The rest of the chase would have been a simple trial of speed, and I made sure of overhauling the mustang before he could reach the opposite side, when a new obstacle presented itself. A vast herd of cattle and horses studded the savanna throughout its whole extent; these, startled by our wild gallop, tossed their heads, and ran affrighted in every direction, but frequently as otherwise, directly in our way. More than once I was forced to rein in, to save my neck or my horse's from being broken over a fierce bull or a long-horned lumbering ox; and more than once I was compelled to swerve from my course.

What vexed me most, was that in this zigzag race, the mustang, from practice perhaps, had the advantage; and while it continued, he increased his distance.

We cleared the drove at length; but to my chagrin I perceived that we were nearly across the plain. As I glanced ahead, I saw the chaparral near, with taller trees rising over it; beyond, I saw the swell of a hill, with white walls upon its summit. It was the hacienda already mentioned; we were riding directly toward it.

I was growing anxious about the result. Should the horseman reach the thicket, I would be almost certain to lose him. I dared not let him escape. What would my men say, if I went back without him? I had hindered the sentry from firing, and permitted to escape, perhaps a spy, perhaps some important personage. His desperate efforts to get off favored the supposition that he was one or the other. He must be taken!

Under fresh impulse, derived from these reflections, I lanced the flanks of my horse more deeply than ever. Moro seemed to divine my thoughts, and stretched himself to his utmost. There were no more cattle, not an obstacle, and his superior speed soon lessened the distance between himself and the mustang. Ten seconds more would do it.

The ten seconds flew by. I felt myself within shooting distance; I drew my pistol from its holster.

"*Alto! o yo tiro!*" (Halt! or I fire), I cried aloud.

There was no reply; the mustang kept on! "Halt!" I cried again, unwilling to take the life of a fellow-creature—"halt! or you are a dead man!"

No reply again.

There were not six yards between myself and the Mexican horseman. Riding straight behind him, I could have sent a bullet into his back. Some secret instinct restrained me; it was partly, though not altogether, a feeling of admiration; there was an indefinable idea in my mind at the moment. My finger rested on the trigger, and I could not draw it.

"He must not escape! He is nearing the trees! He must not be allowed to enter the thicket; I must cripple the horse."

I looked for a place to aim at—his hips were toward me—should I hit him there he might still get off. Where should I aim?

At this moment the animal wheeled, as if guided by his own impulse—perhaps by the knees of his rider—and shot off in a new direction. The object of this maneuver was to throw me out of the track. So far it was successful; but it gave me just the opportunity to aim as I wanted; as it brought the mustang's side toward me; and leveling my pistol, I sent a bullet through his kidneys. A single plunge forward was his last, and both horse and rider came to the ground.

In an instant the latter had disengaged himself from his struggling steed, and stood upon his feet. Fearing that he might still endeavor to escape to the cover of the thicket, I spurred forward, pistol in hand, and pointed the weapon at his head. But he made no attempt either at further flight or resistance. On the contrary, he stood with folded arms, fronting the leveled tube, and, looking me full in the face, said with an air of perfect coolness:

"*No matame, amigo! Soy muger!*" (Do not kill me, friend! I am a woman!)

CHAPTER III.

MY CAPTIVE.

"Do not kill me, friend! I am a woman!"

This declaration scarcely astonished me; I was half prepared for it. During our wild gallop, I had noticed one or two circumstances which led me to suspect that the spy I pursued was a female. As the mustang sprung over the *zequia*, the flowing skirt of the *manga* was puffed upward, and hung for some moments spread out in the air. A velvet bodice beneath, a tunic-like skirt, the *tournure* of the form, all impressed me as singular for a caballero, however rich and young. The limbs I could not see, as the goat-skin *armas-de-agua* were drawn over them; but I caught a glimpse of a gold spur, and a heel of a tiny red boot to which it was attached. The clubbed hair, too, loosened by a violent motion, had fallen backward, and in two thick plaits, slightly disheveled, rested upon the croup of the horse. A young Indian's might have been equally as long, but his tresses would have been jet-black and coarse-grained, whereas those under my eyes were soft, silky, and nut-brown. Neither the style of riding *a la Duchesse de Berri*—nor the manlike costume of *manga* and hat, were averse to the idea that the rider was a woman. Both the style and costume are common to the rancheras of Mexico. Moreover, as the mustang made his last double, I had caught a near view of the side face of the rider. The features of no man—not of the Trojan shepherd, not of Adonis or Endymion—were so exquisitely chiseled as they. Certainly a woman! Her declaration at once put an end to my conjectures, but, as I have said, did not astonish me.

I was astonished, however, by its tone and manner. Instead of being uttered in accents of alarm, it was pronounced as coolly as if the whole thing had been a jest! Sadness, not supplication, was the prevailing tone, which was further carried out as she knelt to the ground, pressed her lips to the muzzle of the still breathing mustang, and exclaimed:

"*Ay-de-mi! pobre yegua! muerte! muerte!*" (Alas me! poor mare! dead! dead!)

"A woman!" said I, feigning astonishment. My interrogatory was unheeded; she did not even look up.

"*Ay-de-mi! pobre yegua! Lola, Lolita!*" she repeated, as coolly as if the dead mustang was the only object of her thoughts, and I, the armed assassin, fifty miles from the spot!

"A woman?" I again ejaculated—in my embarrassment scarcely knowing what to say.

"*Si, señor; nada mas—que quiere V.?*" (Yes, sir; nothing more—what do you want?)

As she made this reply, she rose to her feet and stood confronting me without the slightest semblance of fear. So unexpected was the answer, both in tone and sentiment, that for the life of me I could not help breaking into a laugh.

"You are merry, sir. You have made me sad; you have killed my favorite!"

I shall not easily forget the look that accompanied these words—sorrow, anger, contempt, defiance, were expressed in one and the same glance. My laughter was suddenly checked; I felt humiliated in that proud presence.

"*Senorita,*" I replied, "I deeply regret the necessity I have been under; it might have been worse—"

"And how, pray?—how worse?" demanded she, interrupting me.

"My pistol might have been aimed at yourself, but for a suspicion—"

"*Carrambo!*" cried she, again interrupting me, "it could not have been worse! I loved that creature dearly—dearly as I do my life—as I love my father—*pobre yegua yeguita—ita—ita!*"

And as she thus wildly expressed herself, she bent down, passed her arms around the neck of the mustang, and once more pressed her lips to its velvet muzzle. Then gently closing its eyelids, she rose to an erect attitude, and stood with folded arms regarding the lifeless form with a sad and bitter expression of countenance.

I scarcely knew what to do. I was in a dilemma with my fair captive. I would have given a month of my "pay-roll" to have restored the spotted mustang to life; but as that was out of the question, I bethought me of some means of making restitution to its owner. An offer of money would not be delicate. What then?

A thought occurred to me that promised to relieve me from my embarrassment. The eagerness of the Mexicans to obtain our large American horses—*frisones*, as they term them—was well known throughout the army. Fabulous prices were often paid for them by these *ricos* who wanted them for display upon the *Paseo*. We had many good half-bred bloods in the troop; one of these, thought I, might be acceptable even to a lady who had lost her pet.

I made the offer as delicately as I could. It was rejected with scorn!

"What, señor!" cried she, striking the ground with her foot till the rowels rung—"what? A horse to me?—*Mira!*" she continued, pointing to the plain; "look there, sir! There are a thousand horses; they are mine! Now, know the value of your offer. Do I stand in need of a horse?"

"But, señorita," stammered I, apologetically, "these are horses of native race. The one I propose to—"

"Bah!" she exclaimed, interrupting me, and pointing to the mustang; "I would not have exchanged that native for all the *frisones* in your troop. Not one of them was its equal!"

A personal slight would not have called forth a contradiction; yet this defiance had that effect; she had touched the chord of my vanity—I might almost say, of my affection. With some pique, I replied:

"One, señorita?"

I looked toward Moro as I spoke. Her eyes followed mine, and she stood for some moments gazing at him in silence. I watched the expression of her eye; I saw it kindle into admiration as it swept over the gracefully curving outlines of my noble steed. He looked at the moment superb; the short skurry had drawn the foam from his lips, and flakes of it clung against his neck and counter, contrasting finely with the shining black of his skin; his sides heaved and fell in regular undulations, and the smoke issued from his blood-red nostrils; his eye was still on fire, and his neck proudly arched, as though conscious of his late triumph, and the interest he was now exciting.

For a long while she stood gazing upon him, and though she spoke not a word, I saw that she recognized his fine points.

"You are right, caballero," she said at length, and thoughtfully; "he is."

Just then a series of reflections were passing through my mind, that rendered me extremely uncomfortable; and I felt regret that I had so pointedly drawn her attention to the horse. Would she demand him? That was the thought that troubled me; I had not promised her any horse in my troop, and Moro I would not have given for her herd of a thousand; but on the strength of the offer I had made, what if she should fancy him? The circumstances were awkward for a refusal; indeed, under any circumstances refusal would have been painful. I began to feel that I could deny her nothing. This proud beautiful woman already divided my interest with Moro!

My position was a delicate one; fortunately, I was relieved from it by an incident that carried our thoughts into a new current—the troopers who had followed me at that moment rode up.

She seemed uneasy at their presence; that could not be wondered at, considering their wild garb and fierce looks. I ordered them back to their quarters. They stared for a moment at the fallen mustang with its rich blood-stained trappings, at its late rider, and her picturesque garments; and then, muttering a few words to one another, obeyed the order. I was once more alone with my captive.

CHAPTER IV.

ISOLINA DE VARGAS.

AS SOON as the men were out of hearing, she said interrogatively, "*Tejanos?*"

"Some of them are Texans—not all."

"You are their chief?"

"I am."

"Captain, I presume?"

"That is my rank."

"And now, *Senor Capitan*, am I your captive?"

I knew not how to reply. She saw that I hesitated, and again put the question:

"Am I your captive?"

"I fear, señorita, I am yours."

I fancied, from the glance she gave, that she was contented with what I had said. For all that, the slight curl upon her pretty lip had a provoking air of triumph in it; and she resumed her proud *hauteur* as she replied:

"Come, caballero; this is idle compliment. Am I free to go?"

I wavered betwixt duty and over-politeness; a compromise offered itself.

"Lady," said I, approaching her, and looking as seriously as I could into her beautiful eyes.

"If you give me your word that you are not a

spy, you are free to go; your word—I ask nothing more."

I prescribed these conditions rather in a tone of entreaty than command. I affected sternness, but my countenance must have mocked me.

My captive broke into unrestrained laughter, crying out at intervals:

"I a spy!—a spy! Ha, ha, ha! Senor Capitan, you are jesting!"

"I hope, senorita, you are in earnest. You are no spy, then?—you bear no dispatch for our enemy?"

"Nothing of the sort, mio capitan;" and she continued her light laughter.

"Why then did you try to make away from us?"

"Ah, caballero! are you not Tejanos! Do not be offended when I tell you that your people bear but an indifferent reputation among us Mexicans."

"But your attempt to escape was, to say the least, rash and imprudent; you risked your life by it."

"Orrrambo, yes! I perceive I did," and she looked significantly at the mustang, while a bitter smile played upon her lips. "I perceive it now; I did not then. I did not think there was a horseman in all your troop could come up with me. Merced! there was one. You have overtaken me; you alone could have done it."

For some moments both were silent. We might have remained longer thus, but it occurred to me that I was acting rudely. The lady was still my captive. I had not yet given her permission to depart; I hastened to tender it.

"Spy or no spy, senorita, I shall not detain you. I shall bear the risk; you are free to go."

"Gracias! caballero! And now, since you have behaved so handsomely, I shall set your mind at rest about the risk. Read!"

She handed me a folded paper; at a glance I recognized the safeguard of the commander-in-chief, enjoining upon all to respect its bearer—the *Dona Isolina de Vargas*.

"You perceive, mio capitan, I was not your captive after all! Ha! ha! ha!"

"Lady, you are too generous not to pardon the rudeness to which you have been subjected!"

"Freely, capitan—freely."

"I shudder at thought of the risk you have run. Why did you act with such imprudence? Your sudden flight at sight of our picket caused suspicion, and of course it was our duty to follow and capture you. With the safeguard, you had no cause for flight."

"Ha! it was that very safeguard that caused me to fly."

"The safeguard, senorita! Pray explain!"

"Can I trust your prudence, capitan?"

"I promise—"

"Know then, that I was not certain you were *Americanos*; for aught I could see, you might have been a guerrilla of my countrymen. How would it be if this paper, and sundry others that I carry, were to fall into the hands of Canales! You perceive, capitan, we fear our friends more than our enemies."

I now fully comprehended the motive of her flight.

"You speak Spanish too well, mio capitan," continued she. "Had you cried 'Halt!' in your native tongue, I should at once have pulled up, and perhaps saved my pet. Ah, me!—*pobre yegua! pobre Lola!*"

As she uttered the last exclamation, her feelings once more overcame her; and sinking down upon her knees, she passed her arms around the neck of her mustang, now stiff and cold. Her face was buried in the long, thick mane, and I could perceive the tears sparkling like dewdrops over the tossed hair.

"*Pobre Lolita!*" she continued, "I have good cause to grieve; I had reason to love you well. More than once you saved me from the fierce Lipan and the brutal Comanche. What am I to do now? I dread the Indian foray; I shall tremble at every sign of the savage. I dare no more venture upon the prairie; I dare not go abroad; I must tamely stay at home. *Mia querida!* you were my wings; they are clipped—I fly no more."

All this was uttered in a tone of extreme bitterness; and I—who so loved my own brave steed—could appreciate her feelings. With the hope of imparting even a little consolation, I repeated my offer.

"Senorita," I said, "I have swift horses in my troop—some of noble race—"

"You have no horse in your troop I value."

"You have not seen them all!"

"All—every one of them—to-day, as you fled out of the city."

"Indeed?"

"Indeed, yes, noble capitan. I saw you as you carried yourself so cavalierly at the head of your troop of *filibusteros*—Ha! ha! ha!"

"Senorita, I saw not you."

"*Carrambo!* it was not for the want of using your eyes. There was not a *balcon* or *reja* into which you did not glance—not a smile in the whole street you did not seem anxious to reciprocate—Ha! ha! ha! I fear, Senor Capi-

tan, you are the Don Juan de Tenorio of the North."

"Lady, it is not my character."

"Nonsense! you are proud of it. I never saw man who was not. But come! a truce to badinage. About the horse—you have none in your troop I value, save one."

I trembled as she spoke.

"It is he," she continued, pointing to Moro.

I felt as if I should sink into the earth. My embarrassment prevented me for some time from replying. She noticed my hesitation, but remained silent, awaiting my answer.

"Senorita," I stammered out at length, "that steed is a great favorite—an old and tried friend. If you desire—to possess him, he is—he is at your service."

In emphasizing the "if," I was appealing to her generosity. It was to no purpose.

"Thank you," she replied, coolly; "he shall be well cared for. No doubt he will serve my purpose. How is his mouth?"

I was choking with vexation, and could not reply. I began to hate her.

"Let me try him," continued she. "Ah! you have a curb bit—that will do; but it is not equal to ours. I use a *mameluke*. Help me to that lazo."

She pointed to a lazo of white horse-hair, beautifully plaited, that was coiled upon the saddle of the mustang.

I unloosed the rope—mechanically I did—and in the same way adjusted it to the horn of my saddle. I noticed that the noose-ring was of silver! I shortened the leathers to the proper length.

"Now, capitan!" cried she, gathering the reins in her small gloved hand—"now I shall see how he performs."

At the word, she bounded into the saddle, her small foot scarcely touching the stirrup. She had thrown off her *manga*, and her woman's form was now displayed in all its undulating outlines. The silken skirt draped down to her ankles, and underneath appeared the tiny red boot, the glancing spur, and the lace ruffle of her snow-white *calzoncillos*. A scarlet sash encircled her waist, with its fringed ends drooping to the saddle; and the tight bodice, lashed with lace, displayed the full rounding of her bosom, as it rose and fell in quiet, regular breathing—for she seemed in no way excited or nervous. Her full, round eye expressed only calmness and courage.

I stood transfixed with admiration. I thought of the Amazons; were they beautiful like her? With a troop of such warriors one might conquer a world!

A fierce-looking bull, moved by curiosity or otherwise had separated from the herd, and was seen approaching the spot where we were. This was just what the fair rider wanted. At a touch of the spur the horse sprung forward, and galloped directly for the bull. The latter, cowed at the sudden onset, turned and ran; but his swift pursuer soon came within lazo distance. The noose circled in the air, and, launched forward, was seen to settle around the horns of the animal. The horse was now wheeled round, and headed in an opposite direction. The rope tightened with a sudden pluck, and the bull was thrown with violence to the plain, where he lay stunned and apparently lifeless. Before he had time to recover himself, the rider turned her horse, trotted up to the prostrate animal, bent over in the saddle, unfastened the noose, and, after coiling the rope under her arm, came galloping back.

"Superb!—magnificent!" she exclaimed, leaping from the saddle and gazing at the steed. "Beautiful!—most beautiful! Ah, Lola, poor Lola! I fear I shall soon forget thee!"

The last words were addressed to the mustang. Then turning to me she added:

"And this horse is mine?"

"Yes, lady, if you will it," I replied, somewhat cheerlessly, for I felt as if my best friend were about to be taken from me."

"But I do not will it," said she, with an air of determination; and then, breaking into a laugh, she cried out: "Ha! capitan, I know your thoughts. Think you I cannot appreciate the sacrifice you would make? Keep your favorite. Enough that one of us should suffer;" and she pointed to the mustang. "Keep the brave black; you well know how to ride him. Were he mine, no mortal could influence me to part with him."

"There is but one who could influence me."

As I said this I looked anxiously for the answer. It was not in words I expected it, but in the glance. Assuredly there was no frown. I even fancied I could detect a smile—a blending of triumph and satisfaction. It was short-lived, and my heart fell again under her light laugh.

"Ha! ha! ha! That one is of course your lady-love. Well, noble capitan, if you are as true to her as to your brave steed, she will have no cause to doubt your fealty. I must leave you. Adios!"

"Shall I not be permitted to accompany you to your home?"

"*Gracias!* no, senor. I am at home. *Mira!* my father's house!" She pointed to the hacienda. "Here is one who will look to the remains of poor Lola;" and she signaled to a vaquero at that moment coming from the herd.

"Remember, capitan, you are an enemy; I must not accept your politeness; neither may I offer you hospitality. Ah! you know not us—you know not the tyrant Santa Anna. Perhaps even at this moment his spies are—" She glanced suspiciously around as she spoke. "Oh Heavens!" she exclaimed, with a start, as her eyes fell upon the form of a man advancing down the hill. "*Santissima Virgen!* it is Ijurra!"

"Ijurra?"

"Only my cousin; but—" She hesitated, and then suddenly changing to an expression of entreaty, she continued: "Oh, leave me, senor! *Por amor Dios!* leave me! Adieu, adieu!"

Though I longed to have a nearer view of "Ijurra," the hurried earnestness of her manner overcame me; and without making other reply than a simple "Adios," I vaulted into the saddle and rode off.

On reaching the border of the woods, curiosity—a stronger feeling perhaps—mastered my politeness; and under pretense of adjusting my stirrup, I turned in the saddle and glanced back. Ijurra had arrived upon the ground.

I beheld a tall dark man, dressed in the usual costume of the ricos of Mexico: dark cloth polka-jacket, blue military trowsers, with scarlet sash around his waist, and low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat upon his head. He appeared about thirty years of age, whiskered, mustached, and, after a fashion, handsome. It was not his age, nor his personal appearance, nor yet his costume, that had my attention at the moment. I watched only his actions. He stood confronting his cousin, or rather he stood over her, for she appeared before him in an attitude of fear! He held a paper in one hand, and I saw he was pointing to it as he spoke. There was a fierce, vulture-like expression upon his face; and even in the distance I could tell, from the tones of his voice, that he was talking angrily.

Why should she fear him? Why submit to such rude rebuke? He must have a strange power over that spirit who could force it thus tamely to listen to reproach!

These were my reflections. My impulse was to drive the spurs into the sides of my horse and gallop back upon the ground. I might have done so had the scene lasted much longer, but I saw the lady suddenly leave the spot and walk rapidly in the direction of the hacienda.

I wheeled round again, and plunging under the shadows of the forest, soon fell into a road leading to the rancheria. With my thoughts full of the incident that had just transpired, I rode unconsciously, leaving my horse to his own guidance.

My reverie was interrupted by the challenge of one of my own sentries, which admonished me that I had arrived at the entrance of the village.

CHAPTER V.

AN ORDER TO FORAGE.

I WENT to my quarters and again mounted the azotea to think over my late adventure.

I had scarcely made two turns of the roof, when a horseman galloped into the plaza. He was in dragoon uniform, and I soon perceived he was an orderly from head-quarters, inquiring for the commandant of the outpost. One of the men pointed to me; and the orderly trotting forward, drew up in front of the alcalde's house, and announced that he was the bearer of a dispatch from the general-in-chief, at the same time showing a folded paper. I directed him to pass it up on the point of his saber, which he did; and then saluting me, he turned his horse and galloped back as he had come.

I opened the dispatch and read:

"HEAD-QUARTERS, ARMY OF OCCUPATION,
July—th, 1846.

"SIR—You will take a sufficient number of your men, and proceed to the hacienda of Don Ramon de Vargas, in the neighborhood of your station. You will there find five thousand head of beeves, which you will cause to be driven to the camp of the American army, and delivered to the commissary-general. You will find the necessary drivers upon the ground, and a portion of your troop will form the escort. The inclosed note will enable you to understand the nature of your duty. ———"

A. A. Adjutant-general.

"CAPTAIN WARFIELD."

"Surely," thought I, as I finished reading—"surely there is a 'Providence that shapes our ends.' Just as I was cudgeling my brain for some scheme of introduction to Don Ramon de Vargas, here comes one ready fashioned to my hand."

Without loss of time, I issued the command for about fifty of the rangers to "boot and saddle."

I was about to pay more than ordinary attention to my toilet, when it occurred to me I might as well first peruse the "note" referred to in the dispatch. I opened the paper; to my surprise the document was in Spanish. This did not puzzle me, and I read:—

"The five thousand beeves are ready for you, according to the contract, but I cannot take upon me to deliver them. They must be taken from me with a show of force; and even a little rudeness, on the part of those you send, would not be out of place. My vaqueros are at your service, but I must not command them. You may press them."

"RAMON DE VARGAS."

This note was addressed to the commissary-general of the American army. Its meaning, though to the uninitiated a little obscure, was to me as clear as noonday; and, although it gave me a high opinion of the administrative talents of Don Ramon de Vargas, it was by no means a welcome document. It rendered null every act of the fine programme I had sketched out. By its directions there was to be no "embracing," no hobnobbing over wine, no friendly chat with the Don, no *tele-a-tete* with his beautiful daughter—no; but, on the contrary, I was to ride up with a swagger, bang the doors, threaten the trembling porter, kick the peons, and demand from their master five thousand head of beef-cattle—all in true freebooting style!

A nice figure I shall cut, thought I, in the eyes of Isolina.

A little reflection, however, convinced me that that intelligent creature would be in the secret. Yes, she will understand my motives. I can act with as much mildness as circumstances will permit. My Texan lieutenant will do the kicking of the peons, and that without much pressing. If she be not cloistered, I will have a glimpse at her; so here goes.

"To horse!"

The bugle gave the signal; fifty rangers—with Lieutenants Holingsworth and Wheatley—leaped into their saddles, and next moment were filing by twos from the plaza, myself at their head.

A twenty minutes' trot brought us to the front gate of the hacienda, where we halted. The great door, massive and jail-like, was closed, locked and barred; the shutters of the windows as well. Not a soul was to be seen outside, not even the apparition of a frightened peon. I had given my Texan lieutenant his cue; he knew enough of Spanish for the purpose.

Flinging himself out of the saddle, he approached the gate, and commenced hammering upon it with the butt of his pistol.

"*Ambre la puerta!*" (Open the door!) cried he.

No answer.

"*La puerta—la puerta!*" he repeated in a louder tone.

Still no answer.

"*Ambre la puerta!*" once more vociferated the lieutenant, at the same time thundering on the woodwork with his weapon.

When the noise ceased, a faint "*Quien es?*" (Who is it?) was heard from within.

"*Yo!*" bawled Wheatley; "*ambre! ambre!*"

"*Si, señor,*" answered the voice, in a somewhat tremulous key.

"*Anda! anda! Somos hombres de bien.*" (Quick, then! We are honest men.)

A rattling of chains and shooting of bolts now commenced, and lasted for at least a couple of minutes, at the end of which time the great folding-doors opened inward, displaying to view the swarthy leather clad *portero*, the brick-paved *saguan*, and a portion of the *patio*, or courtyard within.

As soon as the door was fairly open. Wheatley made a rush at the trembling porter, caught him by the jerkin, boxed both his ears, and then commanded him in a loud voice to summon the *dueno*!

This conduct, somewhat unexpected on the part of the rangers, seemed to be just to their taste; and I could hear behind me the whole troop chuckling in half-suppressed laughter. *Guerrilleros* as they were, they had never been allowed much license in their dealings with the inhabitants—the non-combatants—of the country, and much less had they witnessed such conduct on the part of their officers. Indeed, it was cause of complaint in the ranks of the American army, and with many officers too, that even hostile Mexicans were treated with a lenient consideration denied to themselves. Wheatley's behavior, therefore, touched a chord in the hearts of our following, that vibrated pleasantly enough; they began to believe that the campaign was about to become a little more jolly.

"*Señor,*" stammered the porter, "the *du-du-eno* has given or—orders—he *wi-wi*—will not—ee any one."

"Will not?" echoed Wheatley; "go, tell him he must!"

"Yes, *amigo,*" I said soothingly; for I began to fear the man would be too badly frightened to deliver his message. "Go, say to your master that an American officer has business with him, and must see him immediately."

The man went off, after a little more persuasion from the free hand of Wheatley, of course leaving the gates open behind him.

We did not wait for his return. The patio looked inviting; and, directing Holingsworth to remain outside with the men, and the Texan lieutenant to follow me, I headed my horse for the great archway, and rode in.

CHAPTER VI.

DON RAMON.

On entering the courtyard no human face greeted our searching glances. In looking to the rear—into the great corral, or cattle-yard—we could see numerous peons in their brown leather dresses, with naked legs and sandaled feet; vaqueros in all their grandeur of velvet-

eens, bell-buttons, and gold or silver lace; with a number of women and young girls in colored *naguas* and *rebosos*. A busy scene was presented in that quarter.

Without exchanging a word, Wheatley and I sat silent in our saddles, awaiting the return of the *portero*. Already the peons, vaqueros, and wenches, had poured in through the back gateway, and stood staring with astonishment at the unexpected guests.

After a considerable pause, the tread of feet was heard upon the corridor, and presently the messenger appeared and announced that the *dueno* was coming.

In a minute after, one of the curtains was drawn and an old gentleman made his appearance behind the railing. He was a person of large frame, and although slightly stooping with age, his step was firm, and his whole aspect bespoke a wonderful energy and resolution. His eyes were large and brilliant, shadowed by heavy brows, upon which the hair still retained its dark color, although that of his head was white as snow. He was simply habited—in a jacket of nankeen cloth, and wide trowsers of like material. He wore neither waistcoat nor cravat. A full white shirt of finest linen covered his breast, and a sash of dull blue color was twisted around his waist. On his head was a costly hat of the "Guayaquil grass," and in his fingers a husk cigarrito smoking at the end.

Altogether, the aspect of Don Ramon—for it was he—despite its assumed sternness, was pleasing and intelligent; and I should have relished a friendly chat with him, even upon his own account.

This, however, was out of the question. I must abide by the spirit of my orders: the farce must be played out; so, touching the flanks of my horse, I rode forward to the edge of the veranda, and placed myself *vis-a-vis* with the Don.

"Are you Don Ramon de Vargas?"

"Si, señor," was the reply, in a tone of angry astonishment.

"I am an officer of the American army"—I spoke loud, and in Spanish, of course, for the benefit of the peons and vaqueros. "I am sent to offer you a contract to supply the army with beeves. I have here an order from the general-in-chief—"

"I have no beeves for sale," interrupted Don Ramon, in a loud, indignant voice; "I shall have nothing to do with the American army."

"Then, sir," retorted I, "I must take your beeves without your consent. You shall be paid for them, but take them I must; my orders require that I should do so. Moreover, your vaqueros must accompany us, and drive the cattle to the American camp."

As I said this, I signaled to Holingsworth, who rode in with his following; and then the whole troop, filing through the back gateway, began to collect the frightened vaqueros, and set them about the work.

"I protest against this robbery!" shouted Don Ramon. "It is infamous—contrary to the laws of civilized warfare. I shall appeal to my Government—to yours—I shall have redress."

"You shall have payment, Don Ramon," said I, apparently trying to pacify him.

"Payment, *carrambo!*—payment from robbers, *filibusteros!*"

"Come, come, old gentleman!" cried Wheatley, who was only half behind the scenes, and who spoke rather in earnest, "keep a good tongue in your head, or you may lose something of more value to you than your cattle. Remember whom you are talking to."

"*Tejanos! ladrones!*" hissed Don Ramon, with an earnest application of the latter phrase that would certainly have brought Wheatley's revolver from his belt, had I not, at the moment, whispered a word in the lieutenant's ear.

"Hang the old rascal!" muttered he in reply to me; "I thought he was in earnest. Look here, old fellow!" he continued, addressing himself to Don Ramon, "don't you be scared about the dollars. Uncle Sam's a liberal trader and a good paymaster. I wish your beef was mine, and I had his promise to pay for it. So take things a little easier, if you please; and don't be so free of your 'filibusteros' and 'ladrones.' Free-born Texans ain't used to such talk."

Don Ramon suddenly cut short the colloquy by angrily closing the curtains, and hiding himself from our sight.

During the whole scene I had great difficulty in controlling my countenance. I could perceive that the Mexican labored under a similar difficulty. There was a laughing devil in the corner of his keen eye that required restraint; and I thought once or twice either he or I should lose our equanimity. I certainly should have done so, but that my heart and eyes were most of the time in other quarters. As for the Don, he was playing an important part; and a suspicion of his hypocrisy, on the minds of some of his leather-clad greasers who listened to the dialogue, might have afterward brought him to grief. Most of them were his own domestics and retainers, but not all. There were free rancheros among them—some who belonged to the *pueblita*—some, perchance, who had figured in *pronunciamentos*—who voted at elections,

and styled themselves citizens. The Don, therefore, had good reasons for assuming a character; and well did the old gentleman sustain it.

As he drew the curtain, his half-whispered "Adios, capitán!" heard only by myself, sounded full of sweetness and promise; and I felt rather contented as I straightened myself in the saddle, and issued the order for rieving his cattle.

CHAPTER VII.

"UN PAPELCITO."

WHEATLEY now rode after the troop, with which Holingsworth had already entered the corral. A band of drivers was speedily pressed into service; and with these we proceeded to the great plain at the foot of the hill, where most of Don Ramon's cattle were at pasture.

Once in the rear of the buildings, I had a full view of the great meadow already known to me; and pulling up, I sat in the saddle, and watched the animated scene that was there being enacted. Bulls, half-wild, rushing to and fro in mad fury, vaqueros mounted on their light mustangs, with streaming sash and winding lazo; rangers upon their heavier steeds, offering but a clumsy aid to the more adroit and practiced herdsmen; others driving off large groups that had been already collected and brought into subjection; and all this amidst the fierce bellowing of the bulls, the shouts and laughter of the delighted troopers, the shriller cries of the vaqueros and peons; the whole forming a picture that, under other circumstances, I should have contemplated with interest.

Just then it occurred to me that I had not sufficiently reconnoitered the front of the dwelling. As we approached it, we had observed that the shutters of the windows were closed; but these opened inward, and since that time one or the other of them might have been set a little ajar. From my knowledge of Mexican interiors, I knew that the front windows are those of the principal apartments—of the *sala* and grand *cuarto*, or drawing-room—precisely those where the inmates of that hour should be found.

In another moment I was turning my horse to inspect the windows, when I heard the word "Capitan," pronounced in a voice that sounded soft as a silver bell, and thrilled to my heart like a strain of music.

I looked toward the windows. It came not thence; they were close shut as ever. Whence—

Before I had time to ask myself the question, the "Capitan" was repeated in a somewhat louder key, and I now perceived that the voice proceeded from above—from the azotea.

I wrenched my horse round, at the same time turning my eyes upward. I could see no one; but just at that moment an arm, that might have been attached to the bust of Venus, was protruded through a notch in the parapet. In the small hand, wickedly sparkling with jewels, was something white, which I could not distinguish until I saw it projected on the grass—at the same moment that the phrase "Un papercito" reached my ears.

Without hesitation I dismounted—made myself master of the *papercito*; and then leaped once more into the saddle, looking upward. I had purposely drawn my horse some distance from the walls, so that I might command a better view. I was not disappointed—Isolina!

The face, that lovely face, was just distinguishable through the slender embrasure, the large brown eyes gazing upon me with that half-earnest, half-mocking glance I had already noticed, and which produced within me both pleasure and pain!

I was about to speak to her, when I saw the expression suddenly change; a hurried glance was thrown backward, as if the approach of some one disturbed her; a finger rested momentarily on her lips, and then her face disappeared behind the screening wall of the parapet.

I understood the universal sign, and remained silent.

For some moments I was undecided whether to go or stay. She had evidently withdrawn from the front of the building, though she was still upon the azotea. Some one had joined her; and I could hear voices in conversation; her own contrasting with the harsher tones of a man. Perhaps her father—perhaps—that other relative—less agreeable supposition!

I was about to ride off, when it occurred to me that I had better first master the contents of the "papercito." Perhaps it might throw some light on the situation, and enable me to adopt the more pleasant alternative of remaining a while longer upon the premises.

Facing around I drew forth the strip of folded paper, and spread it open before me. Though written in pencil, and evidently in a hurried impromptu, I had no difficulty in deciphering it. My heart throbbed exultingly as I read:—

"Capitan! I know you will pardon our dry hospitality. Remember what I told you yesterday; we fear our friends more than our foes, and we have a guest in the house my father dreads more than you and your terrible *filibusteros*. I am not angry with you for my pet, but you have carried off my lazo as well. Ah, capitán! would you rob me of everything?—Adios!"

ISOLINA.

Thrusting the paper back into my bosom, I sat for some time pondering upon its contents. Part was clear enough—the remaining part full of mystery.

CHAPTER VIII. AN OLD ENMITY.

WHEN a short distance separated me from the walls, I drew up; and turning in the saddle, glanced back to the parapet. A face was there, where hers had been; but, oh, the contrast between her lovely features and those that now met my gaze! Hyperion to the Satyr!

Our eyes met; and that first glance stamped the relationship between us—hostility for life! Not a word passed, and yet the looks of each told the other, in the plainest language, "I am your foe." Had we sworn it in wild oaths, in all the bitter hyperbole of insult, neither of us would have felt it more profound and keen.

No words passed between Ijurra and myself; none were needed. Each read in the other a rival—a rival in love, a competitor for the heart of a lovely woman, the loveliest in Mexico! It is needless to say that, under such an aspect, each hated the other at sight.

In the face of Ijurra I read more. I saw before me a man of bad heart and brutal nature. His large, and to speak the truth, beautiful eyes, had in them an animal expression. They were not without intelligence, but so much the worse, for that intelligence expressed ferocity and bad faith. His beauty was the beauty of the jaguar. He had the air of an accomplished man, accustomed to conquest in the field of love—heartless, reckless, false. Oh, mystery of our nature, there are those who love such men!

In Ijurra's face I read more; he knew my secret! The significant glance of his eye told me so. He knew why I was lingering there. The satiric smile upon his lip attested it. He saw my efforts to obtain an interview, and confident in his own position, held my failure but lightly—a something only to amuse him. I could tell all this by the sardonic sneer that sat upon his features.

As we continued to gaze, neither moving his eyes from the other, this sneer became too oppressive to be silently borne. I could no longer stand such a satirical reading of my thoughts. The insult was as marked as words could have made it; and I was about to have recourse to words to reply when the clatter of a horse's hoofs caused me to turn my eyes in an opposite direction. A horseman was coming up the hill, in a direct line from the pastures. I saw it was one of the lieutenants—Holingsworth.

A few more stretches of his horse brought the lieutenant upon the ground, where he pulled up directly in front of me.

"Captain Warfield!" said he, speaking in an official tone, "the cattle are collected; shall we proceed?"

He proceeded no further with that sentence; his eye, chance directed, was carried up to the azotea, and rested upon the face of Ijurra. He started in his saddle, as if a serpent had stung him; his hollow eyes shot prominently out, glaring wildly from their sockets, while the muscles of his throat and jaws twitched in convulsive action.

Breaking into a wild laugh, he shrieked out: "Rafael Ijurra, by the eternal God!"

This awful and emphatic recognition produced its effect. I saw that Ijurra knew the man who addressed him. His dark countenance turned suddenly pale, and then became mottled with livid spots, while his eyes scintillated, and rolled about in the unsteady glances of terror. He made no reply beyond the ejaculation "Demonio!" which seemed involuntarily to escape him. He appeared unable to reply; surprise and fright held him spell-bound and speechless!

"Traitor! villain! murderer!" shrieked Holingsworth, "we've met at last; now for a squaring of our accounts!" and in the next instant the muzzle of his rifle was pointed to the notch in the parapet—pointing to the face of Ijurra!

"Hold, Holingsworth!—hold!" cried I, pressing my heel deeply into my horse's flanks, and dashing forward.

Though my steed sprang instantly to the spur, and as quickly I caught the lieutenant's arm, I was too late to arrest the shot. I spoiled his aim, however; and the bullet, instead of passing through the brain of Rafael Ijurra, as it would certainly have done, glanced upon the mortar of the parapet, sending a cloud of lime-dust into his face.

Up to that moment the Mexican had made no attempt to escape beyond the aim of his antagonist. Terror must have glued him to the spot. It was only when the report of the rifle, and the blinding mortar broke the spell, that he was able to turn and fly. When the dust cleared away, his head was no longer above the wall.

I turned to my companion, and addressed him in some warmth:

"Lieutenant Holingsworth! I command—" "Captain Warfield," interrupted he, in a tone of cool determination, "you may command me in all matters of duty, and I shall obey you. This is a private affair; and, by the

Eternal, the general himself—Bah! I lose time; the villain will escape!" and before I could seize either himself or his bridle-rein, Holingsworth, had shot his horse past me, and entered the gateway at a gallop.

I followed as quickly as I could, and reached the patio almost as soon as he; but too late to hinder him from his purpose.

I grasped him by the arm, but with determined strength he wrenched himself free—at the same instant gliding out of the saddle.

Pistol in hand, he rushed up the *escalera*, his trailing scabbard clanking upon the stone steps as he went. He was soon out of my sight, behind the parapet of the azotea.

Flinging myself from the saddle, I followed as fast as my legs would carry me.

While on the stairway, I heard loud words and oaths above, the crash of falling objects, and then two shots following quick and fast upon each other. I heard screaming in a woman's voice, and then a groan—the last uttered by a man.

On reaching the azotea—which I did in a few seconds of time—I found perfect silence there.

I ran to and fro over the whole roof; I saw flower-pots freshly broken. It was the crash of them I had heard while coming up.

I rushed to another part of the roof. I saw a small *escalera*—a private stair—that led into the interior of the house.

For a moment I hesitated to follow; but it was not time to stand upon etiquette; and I was preparing to plunge down the stairway, when I heard shouting outside the walls, and then another shot from a pistol.

I turned, and stepped hastily across the azotea in the direction of the sounds. I looked over the parapet. Down the slope of the hill two men were running at the top of their speed, one after the other. The hindmost held in his hand a drawn saber. It was Holingsworth still in pursuit of Ijurra!

The latter appeared to be gaining upon his vengeful pursuer, who, burdened with his accouterments, ran heavily. The Mexican was evidently making for the woods that grew at the bottom of the hill; and in a few seconds more he had entered the timber, and passed out of sight. Like a hound upon the trail, Holingsworth followed, and disappeared from my view at the same spot.

Hoping I might still be able to prevent the shedding of blood, I descended hastily from the azotea, mounted my horse and galloped down the hill.

I reached the edge of the woods where the two had gone in, and followed some distance upon their trail; but I lost it at length, and came to a halt.

I remained for some minutes listening for voices, or, what I more expected to hear, the report of a pistol. Neither sound reached me. I heard only the shouts of the vaqueros on the other side of the hill; and this reminding me of my duty, I turned my horse and rode back to the hacienda.

There everything was silent; not a face was to be seen. The inmates of the house had hidden themselves in rooms barred up and dark; even the damsels of the kitchen had disappeared—thinking, no doubt, that an attack would be made upon the premises, and that spoliation and plunder were intended.

I was puzzled how to act. Holingsworth's strange conduct had disarranged my ideas. I should have demanded admission, and explained the occurrence to Don Ramon; but I had no explanation to give; I rather needed one for myself; and under a painful feeling of suspense as to the result, I rode off from the place.

Half a dozen rangers were left upon the ground with orders to await the return of Holingsworth, and then gallop after us; while the remainder of the troop, with Wheatley and myself in advance of the vast drove, took the route for the American camp.

CHAPTER IX.

RAFAEL IJURRA.

WHEATLEY and I were talking the matter over as we rode along, and endeavoring to account for the strange behavior of Holingsworth. We had both concluded that the affair had arisen from some old enmity—perhaps connected with the Mier expedition—when accidentally I mentioned the Mexican's name. Up to this moment the Texan lieutenant had not seen Ijurra—having been busy with the cattle upon the other side of the hill—nor had the name been pronounced in his hearing.

"Ijurra?" he exclaimed, with a start, reining up, and turning upon me an inquiring look.

"Ijurra."

"Rafael Ijurra, do you think?"

"Yes, Rafael—that is the name."

"A tall, dark fellow, mustached and whiskered?—not ill-looking?"

"Yes; he might answer that description," I replied.

"If it be the same Rafael Ijurra that used to live at San Antonio, there's more than one Texan would like to raise his hair. The same—it must be—there's no two of the name; 'tain't likely—no."

"What do you know of him?"

"Know?—that he's about the most precious scoundrel in all Texas or Mexico either, and that's saying a good deal. Rafael Ijurra? 'Tis he, by thunder! It can be nobody else; and Holingsworth—Ha! now I think of it, it's just the man; and Harding Holingsworth, of all men living, has good reasons to remember him."

"How? Explain!"

The Texan paused for a moment, as if to collect his scattered memories, and then proceeded to detail what he knew of Rafael Ijurra. His account, without the expletives and emphatic ejaculations which adorned it, was substantially as follows:—

Rafael Ijurra was by birth a Texan of Mexican race. He had formerly possessed a hacienda near San Antonio de Bexar, with other considerable property, all of which he had spent at play, or otherwise dissipated, so that he had sunk to the status of a professional gambler. Up to the date of the Mier expedition he had passed off as a citizen of Texas, under the new regime, and pretended much patriotic attachment to the young republic. When the Mier adventure was about being organized, Ijurra had influence enough to have himself elected one of its officers. No one suspected his fidelity to the cause. He was one of those who at the halt by Laredo urged the imprudent advance upon Mier; and his presumed knowledge of the country—of which he was a native—gave weight to his counsel. It afterward proved that his free advice was intended for the benefit of the enemy, with whom he was in secret correspondence.

On the night before the battle Ijurra was missing. The Texan army was captured after a brave defense—in which they slew more than their own number of the enemy—and, under guard, the remnant was marched off for the capital of Mexico. On the second or third day of their march, what was the astonishment of the Texan prisoners to see Rafael Ijurra in the uniform of a Mexican officer, and forming part of their escort! But that their hands were bound, they would have torn him to pieces, so enraged were they at this piece of black treason.

"But what of Holingsworth?" I asked.

"Ah! Holingsworth!" replied the lieutenant; "he has good cause to remember Ijurra, now I think of it. I shall give the story to you as I heard it," and my companion proceeded with a relation which caused the blood to curdle in my veins, as I listened. It fully explained, if it did not palliate, the fierce hatred of the Tennessean toward Rafael Ijurra.

In the Mier expedition Holingsworth had a brother, who, like himself, was made prisoner. He was a delicate youth, and could ill endure the hardships much less the barbarous treatment to which the prisoners were exposed during that memorable march. He became reduced to a skeleton, and worse than that, foot-sore, so that he could no longer endure the pain of his feet and ankles, worn skinless, and charged with the spines of acacias, cactus, and the numerous thorny plants in which the dry soil of Mexico is so prolific. In agony he fell down upon the road.

Ijurra was in command of the guard; from him Holingsworth's brother begged to be allowed the use of a mule. The youth had known Ijurra at San Antonio, and had even lent him money, which was never returned.

"To your feet and forward!" was Ijurra's answer.

"I cannot move a step," said the youth, despairingly.

"Cannot! *Carrai!* we shall see whether you can. Here, Pablo," continued he, addressing himself to one of the soldiers of the guard; "give this fellow the spur; he is restive!"

The ruffian soldier approached with fixed bayonet; seriously intending to use its point on the poor wayworn invalid! The latter rose with an effort, and made a desperate attempt to keep on; but his resolution again failed him. He could not endure the agonizing pain, and after staggering a pace or two, he fell up against a rock.

"I cannot!" he again cried—"I cannot march further; let me die here."

"Forward! or you *shall* die here," shouted Ijurra, drawing a pistol from his belt, and cocking it, evidently with the determination to carry out his threat. "Forward!"

"I cannot," faintly replied the youth.

"Forward, or I fire!"

"Fire!" cried the young man, throwing open the flaps of his hunting-shirt, and making one last effort to stand erect.

"You are scarce worth a bullet," said the monster with a sneer; at the same instant he leveled his pistol at the breast of his victim, and fired! When the smoke was blown aside, the body of young Holingsworth was seen lying at the base of the rock, doubled up, dead!

A thrill of horror ran through the line of captives. Even their habitually brutal guards were touched by such wanton barbarity. The brother of the youth was not six yards from the spot, tightly bound, and witness of the whole scene! Fancy his feelings at that moment!

"No wonder," continued the Texan—"no wonder that Harding Holingsworth don't stand

upon ceremony as to where and when he may attack Rafael Ijurra. I verily believe that the presence of the commander-in-chief wouldn't restrain him from taking vengeance. It ain't to be wondered at!"

The hoof-strokes of half-a-dozen horses coming rapidly from the rear, interrupted the conversation. Without surprise, I perceived that it was Holingsworth and the rangers who had been left at the hacienda.

"Captain Warfield!" said the Tennessean as he spurred alongside, "my conduct no doubt surprises you. I shall be able to explain it to your satisfaction when time permits. It's a long story—a painful one to me; you will not require it from me now. This much let me say—for good reason, I hold Rafael Ijurra as my most deadly foe. I came to Mexico to kill that man; and, by the Eternal! if I don't succeed, I care not who kills me!"

"You have not then—"

With a feeling of relief I put the question, for I read the answer in the look of disappointed vengeance that gleamed in the eyes of the Tennessean. I was not permitted to finish the interrogatory; he knew what I was going to ask, and interrupted me with the reply:

"No, no; the villain has escaped; but by—"

The rest of the emphatic vow was inaudible, but the wild glance that flashed from the speaker's eye expressed his deep purpose more plainly than words.

The next moment he fell back to his place in the troop, and with his head slightly bent forward, rode on in silence.

An hour afterward we reached the village.

CHAPTER X.

AN ODD EPISTLE.

ABOUT noon of the next day the sergeant of the guard reported that a Mexican wished to speak with me. Mechanically, I gave orders for the man to be sent up; but it was not until he appeared before me that I thought of what I was doing.

There was something in his manner that betokened him a messenger. A folded note, which he drew from under his jerkin—after having glanced around to see whether he was noticed—confirmed my observation.

I took the note. There was no superscription, nor did I stay to look for one. My fingers trembled as I tore open the seal. As my eye rested on the writing and recognized it, my heart throbbed so as almost to choke my utterance. I muttered some directions to the messenger; and, to conceal my emotion from him, I turned away and proceeded to the furthest corner of the azotea before reading the note. I called back to the man to go below, and wait for an answer; and, then relieved of his presence, I read as follows:

"July, 18—

"GALLANT CAPITAN!—I had a favorite mare. How fond I was of that creature you may understand, who are afflicted by a similar affection for the noble Moro. In an evil hour, your aim, too true, alas! robbed me of my favorite, but you offered to repay me by robbing yourself, for well know I that the black is to you the dearest object upon earth. Indeed, were I the lady of your love, I should ill brook such a divided affection! Well, mio capitan, I understand the generous sacrifice you would have made, and forbade it; but I know you are desirous of canceling your debt. It is in your power to do so. Listen!

"There is a horse, famed in these parts as the 'white steed of the prairies' (*el caballo de los llanos*). He is a wild-horse, of course; snow-white in color, beautiful in form, swift as the swallow. But why need I describe to you the 'white steed of the prairies?' you are a Tejano, and must have heard of him ere this? Well, mio capitan, I have long had a desire—a frantic one, let me add—to possess this horse. I have offered rewards to hunters—to our own vaqueros, for he sometimes appears upon our plains—but to no purpose. Not one of them can capture, though they have often seen and chased him. Some say that he cannot be taken, that he is so fleet as to gallop, or rather glide out of sight in a glance, and that, too, on the open prairie! There are those who assert that he is a phantom, *un demonio*! Surely so beautiful a creature cannot be the devil? Besides, I have always heard that the devil was black.

"To the point, mio capitan. There are some incredulous people who believe the white steed of the prairies to be a myth, and deny his existence altogether. *Carramba!* I know that he does exist, and, what is more to my present purpose, he is—or was, but two hours ago—within ten miles of where I am writing this note! One of our vaqueros saw him near the banks of a beautiful arroyo, which I know to be his favorite ground. For reasons known to me, the vaquero did not either chase or molest him; but in breathless haste brought me the news.

"Now, capitan, gallant and grand! there is but one who can capture this famed horse, and that is your puissant self. Ah! you have made captive what was once as wild and free. Yes! you can do it—you and Moro!

"Bring me the white steed of the prairies! I shall cease to grieve for poor Lola. ISOLINA."

As I finished reading this singular epistle a thrill of pleasure ran through my veins. I dwelt not on the oddness of its contents, thoroughly characteristic of the writer. Its meaning was clear enough.

I had heard of the white horse of the prairies—what hunter or trapper, trader or traveler, throughout all the wide borders of prairie-

land, has not? Many a romantic story of him had I listened to around the blazing camp-fire—many a tale of German-like *diablerie*, in which the white horse played hero. For nearly a century has he figured in the legends of the prairie "mariner"—a counterpart of the Flying Dutchman—the "phantom-ship" of the fore-castle. Like this, too, ubiquitous—seen to-day scouring the sandy plains of the Platte, to-morrow bounding over the broad llanos of Texas, a thousand miles to the southward!

That there existed a white stallion of great speed and splendid proportions—that there were twenty, perhaps a hundred such—among the countless herds of wild horses that roam over the great plains, I did not for a moment doubt. I myself had seen and chased more than one that might have been termed a "magnificent animal," and that no ordinary horse could overtake; but the one known as the "white steed of the prairies" had a peculiar marking that distinguished him from all the rest—his ears were black!—only his ears, and these were of the deep color of ebony. The rest of his body, mane and tail, was white as fresh-fallen snow.

It was to this singular and mysterious animal that the letter pointed; it was the black-eared steed I was called upon to capture. The contents of the note were specific and plain.

One expression alone puzzled me:

"You have made captive what was once as wild and free." What? I asked myself. I scarce dared to give credence to the answer that leaped like an exulting echo from out my heart!

There was a postscript, of course; but this contained only "business." It gave minutest details as to when, how, and where the white horse had been seen, and stated that the bearer of the note—the vaquero who had seen him—would act as my guide.

I pondered not long upon the strange request. Its fulfillment promised to recover me the position which, but a moment before, I had looked upon as lost forever. I at once resolved upon the undertaking.

"Yes, lovely Isolina! if horse and man can do it, ere another sun sets you shall be mistress of the white horse of the prairies!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE MANADA.

IN half an hour after, with the vaquero for my guide, I rode quietly out of the rancharia. A dozen rangers followed close behind; and, having crossed the river at a ford nearly opposite the village, we struck off into the chaparral on the opposite side.

The men whom I had chosen to accompany me were most of them old hunters, fellows who could "trail" and "crease" with accurate aim. I had confidence in their skill, and, aided by them, I had great hopes we should find the game we were in search of.

As we rode along, I revealed to my following the purpose of the expedition. All of them knew the white steed by fame; one or two averred they had seen him in their prairie wanderings. The whole party were delighted at the idea of such a "scout," and exhibited as much excitement as if I was leading them to a skirmish with guerrilleros.

The country through which we passed was at first a dense chaparral, consisting of the various thorny shrubs and plants for which this part of Mexico is so celebrated.

As we advanced, the aspect changed. The surface became freer of jungle; a succession of glade and thicket in short, a "mesquite prairie." Still advancing, the "openings" became larger, while the timbered surface diminished in extent, and now and then the glades joined each other without interruption.

We had ridden nearly ten miles without drawing bridle, when our guide struck upon the trail of a manada. Several of the old hunters, without dismounting, pronounced the tracks to be those of wild mares, which they easily distinguished from horse tracks. Their judgment proved correct; for following the trail but a short distance further, we came full in sight of the drove, which the vaquero confidently pronounced was the manada we were in search of.

Some of the mares were quietly browsing upon the grass, while others were frisking and playing about, now rearing up as if in combat, now rushing in wild gallop, their tossed manes and full tails flung loosely upon the wind. They were of all colors known to the horse, for in this the race of the Spanish horse is somewhat peculiar.

But where was the lord of this splendid harem?—where the steed?

The vaquero believed he was not far off. I had faith in this man's opinion, who, having passed his life in the observation of wild and half wild horses, had a perfect knowledge of their habits. There was hope then. The steed might be near; perhaps lying down in the shade of the thicket; perhaps with a portion of the manada or some favorite in one of the adjacent glades. If so, our guide assured us we should soon have him in view. He would soon bring the steed upon the ground.

How?

Simply by startling the mares, whose neigh of alarm would be heard from afar.

The plan seemed feasible enough; but it was advisable that we should surround the manada before attempting to disturb them, else they might gallop off in the opposite direction, before any of us could get near.

Without delay, we proceeded to effect the "surround."

The chaparral aided us by concealing our movements; and in half an hour we had deployed around the prairie.

The drove still browsed and played. They had no suspicion that a cordon of hunters was being formed around them, else they would have long since galloped away.

I had myself ridden to the opposite side of the prairie, in order to be certain when the circle was complete. I was now alone, having dropped my companions at intervals along the margin of the timber. I had brought with me the bugle, with a note or two which I intended to give the alarm to the mares.

I had placed myself in a clump of mesquite trees, and was about raising the horn to my lips, when a shrill scream from behind caused me to bring down the instrument, and turn suddenly in my seat. For a moment, I was in doubt as to what could have produced such a singular utterance, when a second time it fell on my ear, and then I recognized it. It was the neigh of the prairie stallion!

Half a dozen springs brought him opposite, and as he galloped past, I saw before me "the white steed of the prairies."

There was no mistaking the marks of that splendid creature; there was the snow-white body, the ears of jetty blackness, the blue muzzle, the red projected nostril, the broad oval quarters, the rounded and symmetric limbs—all the points of an incomparable steed!

Like an arrow he shot past. He did not arrest his pace for an instant, but galloped on in a direct line for the drove.

The mares had answered his first signal with a responsive neigh; and tossing up their heads, the whole manada was instantly in motion. In a few seconds, they stood at rest again, formed in line—as exact as could have been done by a troop of cavalry—and fronting their leader as he galloped up. Indeed, standing as they were, with their heads high in air, it was easy to fancy them mounted men in the array of battle; and often have wild-horses been mistaken for such by the prairie traveler.

Concealment or stratagem could no longer avail; the chase was fairly up. Speed and the lazo must now decide the result; and, with this conviction, I gave Moro the spur and bounded into the open plain.

The neighing of the steed had signaled my companions who shot almost simultaneously out of the timber, and spurred toward the drove, yelling as they came.

I had no eyes for aught but the white steed, after him I directed myself.

On nearing the line of mares, he halted in his wild gallop, twice reared his body upward, as if to reconnoiter the ground; and then, uttering another of his shrill screams, broke off in a direct line toward the edge of the prairie. A wide avenue leading out in that direction seemed to have guided his instincts.

The manada followed, at first galloping in line; but this became broken, as the swifter individuals passed ahead of the others, and the drove was soon strung out upon the prairie.

Through the opening now swept the chase—the pursuers keenly plying the spur—the pursued straining every muscle to escape.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HUNT OF THE WILD HORSE.

My gallant horse soon gave proof of his superior qualities. One after another of my companions was passed; and as we cleared the avenue and entered a second prairie, I found myself mixing with the hindmost of the wild mares. Pretty creatures some of them were; and upon any other occasion, I should have been tempted to fling a lazo over one of them, which I might easily have done. Then I only thought of getting them out of the way, as they were hindering my onward gallop.

Before we had quite crossed the second prairie, I had forged into the front rank, and the mares, seeing I had headed them, broke to the right and left, and scattered away.

All were now behind me, all but the white steed; he alone kept the course, at intervals uttering that same shrill neigh, as if to tantalize and lure me on. He was yet far in advance, and apparently running at his ease.

The horse I bestrode needed neither spur nor guidance; he saw before him the object of the chase, and he divined the will of his rider. I felt him rising under me like a sea-wave. His hoofs struck the turf without impinging upon it. At each fresh spring he came up with elastic rebound, while his flanks heaved with the conscious possession of power.

Before the second prairie was crossed, he had gained considerably upon the white steed; but to my chagrin, I now saw the latter dash right into the thicket.

I found a path and followed. My ear served

to guide me, for the branches crackled as the wild horse broke through. Now and then I caught glimpses of his white body glancing among the green leaves.

In ten minutes' time we had passed through the timber islands, and now the prairie—the grand, limitless prairie—stretched before us, far beyond the reach of vision.

On goes the chase over its grassy level—on till the trees are no longer behind us, and the eye sees naught but the green savanna, and the blue canopy arching over it—on, across the center of that vast circle which has for its boundary the whole horizon.

It is a long, wild ride, a cruel gallop for my matchless Moro. Ten miles of the prairie have we passed—more than that—and as yet I have neither used whip nor spur. The brave steed needs no such prompting; he, too, has his interest in the chase—the ambition not to be outrun.

On we glide in silence. The steed has ceased to utter his taunting neigh; he has lost confidence in his speed; he now runs in dread. Never before has he been so sorely pressed. He runs in silence, and so, too, his pursuer. Not a sound is heard but the stroke of the galloping hoofs—an impressive silence, that betokens the earnestness of the chase.

Less than two hundred yards separate us; I feel certain of victory. A touch of the spur would now bring Moro within range; it is time to put an end to this desperate ride. Now, brave Moro, another stretch, and you shall have rest!

I look to my lazo; it hangs coiled over the horn of my saddle; one end is fast to a ring and staple firmly riveted in the tree-wood. Is the loop clear and free? It is. The coil—is it straight? Yes; all as it should be.

In arranging my lazo I had taken my eyes from the chase, only for a moment; when I looked out again the horse had disappeared!

At the distance of some thirty paces a dark line was seen upon the prairie, running transversely to the course I was following. It appeared to be a narrow crack in the plain; but on spurring nearer, it proved to be a fissure of considerable width—one of those formations known throughout Spanish America as *barrancas*.

Of course the disappearance of the white steed was no longer a mystery. He had made a fearful leap—nearly twenty feet sheer! There was the torn turf on the brink of the chasm, and the displacement of the loose stones, where he had bounded into its bed. He had gone to the left—down the barranca. The abrasion of his hoofs was visible upon the rocks.

I looked down the defile; he was not to be seen. The barranca turned off by an angle at no great distance. He had already passed round the angle, and was out of sight!

It was clear that he had escaped; that to follow would be of no use; and, with this reflection, I abandoned all thoughts of carrying the chase further.

I was hungry; still worse, I was choking with thirst. Not a drop of water was near; I had seen none for twenty miles. The long, hot ride had made me thirsty to an unusual degree, and my poor horse was in a similar condition.

After some reflection, it occurred to me that by following the barranca downward I might find water; at least, this was the most likely direction in which to search for it. I rode forward, therefore, directing my horse along the edge of the chasm.

The fissure deepened as I advanced, until, at the distance of a mile from where I first struck it, the gulf yawned full fifty feet into the plain, the sides still preserving their vertical steepness!

The sun had now gone down; the twilight promised to be a short one. I dared not traverse that plain in the darkness; I might ride over the precipitous edge of the barranca. Besides, it was not the only one; I saw there were others—smaller ones—the beds of tributary streams in seasons of rain. These branched off diagonally or at right angles, and were more or less deep and steep.

Night was fast closing over the prairie; I dared not ride further amid these perilous abysses. I must soon come to a halt, without finding water. I should have to spend the long hours without relief. The prospect of such a night was fearful.

I was still riding slowly onward, mechanically conducting my horse, when a bright object fell under my eyes, causing me to start in my saddle with an exclamation of joy. It was the gleam of water. I saw it in a westerly direction, the direction in which I was going.

It proved to be a small lake or—in the phraseology of the country—a pond. It was not in the bottom of the ravine, where I had hitherto been looking for water, but up on the high prairie. There was no timber around it, no sedge; its shores were without vegetation of any kind, and its surface appeared to correspond with the level of the plain itself.

I had arrived within about two hundred paces of the spot—still keeping my eyes fixed upon the glistening water—when all at once my horse started and drew back! I looked ahead to dis-

cover the cause. The twilight had nearly passed, but in the obscurity I could still distinguish the surface of the prairie. The barranca again frowned before me, running transversely across my path. To my chagrin I perceived that the chasm had made a sudden turn, and that the pond was on its opposite side!

It had now grown quite dark, and I had no choice but to pass the night where I was, though I anticipated a night of torture.

I dropped to the ground, and having led my horse a few rods into the prairie—so as to keep him clear of the precipice—I relieved him of his saddle and bridle, and left him to browse to the full length of the lazo.

I had but few implements to dispose of in my temporary camp—only my rifle and hunting-knife, with horn and pouch, and the double-headed gourd, which served as water-canteen, and which, alas! had been emptied at an early hour of the day. Fortunately, my Mexican blanket was buckled to the croupe. This I unstrapped, and having enveloped myself in its ample folds, and placed my head in the hollow of my saddle, I composed myself as well as I could, in the hope of falling asleep.

After some time, the pain of thirst was less intensely felt. Perhaps the cold damp air of night had the effect of relieving it; but it is more likely that fatigue and long endurance had rendered the sense less acute. Whatever may have been the cause, I suffered less, and felt myself yielding to sleep. There was no sound to keep me awake; perfect stillness reigned around; even the usual howling bark of the prairie wolf did not reach my ear. The place seemed too lonely for this almost ubiquitous night prowler. The only sign of life that told me I was not alone was the occasional stroke of my steed's hoof upon the hard turf, and the "crop crop" that told me he was busy with the short buffalo-grass. But these were soothing sounds—as they admonished me that my faithful companion was enjoying himself after his hard gallop—and strengthened my desire for repose.

I slept, but not lightly. No; my sleep was heavy and full of troubled dreams.

First of all, I was in the presence of a lovely woman; she was dark-eyed, dark-haired—a brunette—a beauty. I traced the features of Isolina. I gazed into her eyes; I was happy in her smiles; I fancied I was beloved. Bright objects were around me. The whole scene was rose-color.

This was a short episode; it was interrupted. I heard shouts and savage yells. I looked out; the house was surrounded by Indians! They were already within the inclosure; and the moment after, crowds of them entered the house. There was much struggling and confusion. I battled with such arms as I could lay hold of; several fell before me; but one—a tall savage, the chief, as I thought—threw his arms around my mistress, and carried her away out of my sight.

I remember not how I got mounted; but I was upon horseback, and galloping over the wide prairie in pursuit of the ravisher. I could see the savage ahead upon a snow-white steed, with Isolina in his arms. I urged my horse with voice and spur, but, as I thought, for long, long hours in vain. The white steed still kept far in advance; and I could get no nearer to him. I thought the savage had changed his form. He was no longer an Indian chief, but the fiend himself; I saw the horns upon his head; his feet were cloven hoofs! I thought he was luring me to the brink of some fell precipice, and I had no longer the power to stay my horse. Ha! The demon and his phantom horse have gone over the cliff! They have carried her along with them! I must follow—I cannot remain behind. I am on the brink. My steed springs over the chasm. I am falling—falling—falling!

I reach the rocks at length. I am not killed; how strange it is I have not been crushed! But no; I still live. And yet I suffer. Thirst chokes and tortures me; my heart and brain are aching, and my tongue is on fire. The sound of water is in my ears; a torrent rushes by, near me. If I could only reach it, I might drink and live; but I cannot move; I am chained to the rocks. I grasp one after another, and endeavor to drag myself along; I partially succeed; but oh, what efforts I make! The labor exhausts my strength. I renew my exertions. I am gaining ground; rock after rock is passed. I have neared the rushing water; I feel its cold spray sprinkling me. I am saved!

After such fashion was my dream. It was the shadow of a reality, somewhat disorganized; but the most pleasant reality was that which awoke me. I found myself in the act of being sprinkled, not by the spray of a torrent, but by a plashing shower from the clouds!

Under other circumstances, this might have been less welcome, but now I hailed it with a shout of joy. The thunder was rolling almost continuously; lightning blazed at short intervals; and I could hear the roar of a torrent passing down the barranca.

To assuage thirst was my first thought; and

for this purpose, I stretched out my concave palms, and held my mouth wide open, thus drinking from the very fountains of the sky.

Though the drops fell thick and heavy, the process was too slow, and a better plan suggested itself. I knew that my *serape* was water-proof; it was one of the best of Parras fabric, and had cost me a hundred silver dollars. This I spread to its full extent, pressing the central parts into a hollow of the prairie. In five minutes' time I had forgotten what thirst was, and wondered how such a thing should have caused me so much torture!

Moro drank from the same "trough," and betook himself to the grass again.

The under side of the blanket was still dry, and the patch of ground which it had sheltered. Along this I stretched myself, drew the *serape* over me; and after listening a while to the loud lullaby of the thunder, fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PRAIRIE REPAST.

I SLEPT sweetly and soundly. I had no dreams, or only such as were light, and forgotten with the return of consciousness.

It was late when I awoke. A bright sun was mounting into the blue and cloudless sky. This orb was already many degrees above the horizon.

To draw the picket-pin of my horse, and saddle him, was the work of a few minutes; this done, I began to bethink me of where I was going. Back to the rancharia, of course!

In gazing out, my eye was attracted by some objects. By the edge of the pond, at less than five hundred yards' distance, five beautiful creatures were standing, which I knew to be antelopes. They were so close to the pond, that their graceful forms were shadowed in the water, and their erect attitudes told that they had just halted after a run. Their number corresponded with the objects I had seen but the moment before far out upon the prairie. I was convinced they were the same. The distance was nothing; these creatures tra-vel with the speed of a swallow.

The sight of the prong-horns stimulated my hunger. My first thought was how to get near them. Curiosity had brought them to the pond; they had espied my horse and myself afar off; and had galloped up to reconnoitre us. But they still appeared shy and timid, and I were evidently not inclined to approach nearer.

The barranca lay between them and me, but I saw that if I could entice them to its brink, they would be within range of my rifle.

Once more staking down my horse, I tried every plan I could think of. I laid myself along the grass, upon my back, and kicked my heels in the air, but to no purpose; the game would not move from the water's edge.

Remembering that my *serape* was of very brilliant colors, I bethought me of another plan, which, when adroitly practiced, rarely fails of success.

Taking the blanket, I lashed one edge to the ramrod of my rifle, having first passed the latter through the upper swivel of the piece. With the thumb of my left hand I was thus enabled to hold the rammer steady and transverse to the barrel. I now dropped upon my knees—holding the gun shoulder-high—and the gay-colored *serape*, spread out almost to its full extent, hung to the ground, and formed a complete cover for my person.

Before making these arrangements, I had crept to the very edge of the barranca—in order to be as near as possible should the antelopes approach on the opposite side.

Of course every maneuver was executed with all the silence and caution I could observe. I was in no reckless humor to frighten off the game. Hunger was my monitor. I knew that not my breakfast alone, but my life, might be depending upon the successful issue of the experiment.

It was not long before I had the gratification of perceiving that my decoy was likely to prove attractive. The prong-horned antelope, like most animals of its kind, has one strongly developed propensity—that of curiosity. Although to a known enemy it is the most timid of creatures, yet in the presence of an object that is new to it, it appears to throw aside its timidity, or rather its curiosity overcomes its sense of fear; and, impelled by the former, it will approach very near to any strange form and regard it with air of bewilderment. The prairie-wolf—a creature that surpasses even the fox in cunning—well knows this weakness of the antelope, and often takes advantage of it. The wolf is less fleet than the antelope, and his pursuit of it in a direct manner would be vain; but with the astute creature, stratagem makes up for the absence of speed.

The square of bright colors soon produced its effect. The five prong-horns came trotting around the edge of the lake, halted, gazed upon it a moment, and then dashed off again to a greater distance. Soon, however, they turned and came running back—this time apparently with greater confidence, and a stronger feeling of curiosity. I could hear them uttering their quick "snorts" as they tossed up their tiny

muzzles and snuffed the air. Fortunately, the wind was in my favor, blowing directly from the game, and toward me; otherwise, they would have "winded" me, and discovered the cheat—for they both know and fear the scent of the human hunter.

At the second approach, they came within a hundred yards of me. My rifle was equal to this range, and I prepared to fire. The leader was nearest, and him I selected as the victim.

Taking sight I pulled trigger.

As soon as the smoke cleared off, I had the satisfaction of seeing the buck down upon the prairie, in the act of giving his last kick. To my surprise, none of the others had been frightened off by the report, but stood gazing at their fallen leader, apparently bewildered!

I bethought me of reloading; but I had incautiously risen to my feet, and so revealed my form to the eyes of the antelopes. This produced an effect which neither the crack of the rifle nor the fall of their comrade had done; and the now terrified animals wheeled about and sped away like the wind. In less than two minutes, they were beyond the reach of vision.

The next question that arose was, how I was to get across the barranca. The tempting morsel lay upon the other side, and I therefore set about examining the chasm in order to find a practicable crossing.

This I fortunately discovered. On both sides the cliff was somewhat broken down, and might be scaled, though not without considerable difficulty.

After once more looking to the security of my horse's trail rope, I placed my rifle where I had slept, and set out to cross the barranca, taking only my knife. I could have no use for the gun, and it would hinder me in scaling the cliffs.

I succeeded in reaching to the bottom of the ravine, and commenced ascending on the opposite side where it was steeper; but I was assisted by the branches of the trailing cedar that grew among the rocks. I noticed, and with some surprise, that the path must have been used before, either by men or animals. The soil that lay upon the ledges was "paddled" as by feet, and the rock in some places scratched and discolored.

These indications only caused me a momentary reflection. I was too hungry to dwell upon any thought but that of eating.

At length I reached the scarp of the cliff, and having climbed out upon the prairie, soon stood over the carcass of the prong-horn. My knife was out in a trice, and next moment I was playing the part of the butcher.

You will no doubt fancy that the next thing I did was to go in search of something to make a fire for the purpose of cooking my breakfast. I did nothing of the sort. I ate my breakfast without cooking. I ate it raw; and had you been in my situation, delicate as you are, you would have done the same.

It is true that, after I had satisfied the first cravings of appetite with the tongue of the antelope, and a few morsels of steak, I became more fastidious, and thought a little roasting might improve the venison.

For this purpose I was about to return to the barranca, in order to gather some sticks of cedar-wood, when my eyes fell upon an object that drove all thoughts of cookery out of my head, and sent a thrill of terror to my heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHASED BY A "GRIZZLY."

THE object that inspired me with such alarm was an animal—the most dreaded of all that inhabit the prairies—the grizzly bear.

This bear was one of the largest; but it was not his size that impressed me with fear, so much as the knowledge of his fierce nature. It was not the first time I had encountered the grizzly bear; and I knew his habits well.

When my eyes first rested upon the brute, he was just emerging out of the barranca at the very spot where I had climbed up myself. It was his tracks, then, I had observed while scaling the cliff!

On reaching the level of the prairie, he advanced a pace or two, and then halting, reared himself erect, and stood upon his hind legs; at the same time he uttered a snorting sound, which resembled the "blowing" of hogs when suddenly startled in the forest. For some moments he remained in this upright attitude, rubbing his head with his fore paws, and playing his huge arms about after the manner of monkeys. In fact, as he stood fronting me, he looked not unlike a gigantic ape; and his yellowish-red color favored a resemblance to the great orang.

When I say that I was terrified by the presence of this unwelcome intruder, I speak no more than truth. Had I been on horseback, I should have regarded the creature no more than the snail that crawled upon the grass. The grizzly bear is too slow to overtake a horse; but I was afoot, and knew that the animal could outrun me, however swift I might deem myself.

There was not a bush where I could hide myself, not a tree into which I might climb. There was no means of escape, and almost none of defense; the knife was the only weapon I had with

me; my rifle I had left upon the other side of the barranca, and to reach it was out of the question. Even could I have got to the path that led down the cliff it would have been madness to attempt crossing there; for although not a tree-climber, the grizzly bear, by means of his great claws, could have scaled the cliff more expeditiously than I. Had I made the attempt, I should have been caught before I could have reached the bottom of the ravine.

The bear was directly in the path. It would have been literally flinging myself "into his embrace" to have gone that way.

A single glance around showed me the utter helplessness of my situation; I saw there was no alternative but a desperate conflict—a conflict with the knife!

Despair, that for a moment had unnerved, now had the effect of bracing me; and, fronting my fierce foe, I stood ready to receive him.

My antagonist, dropping upon all-fours and uttering a loud scream, rushed toward me with open mouth.

I had resolved to await his onset; but as he came nearer, and I beheld his great gaunt form, his gleaming teeth, and his senna-colored eyes flashing like fire, changed my design; a new thought came suddenly into my mind; I turned and fled.

But what was my speed against such a competitor? I was only running myself out of breath. I should be less prepared for the desperate conflict that must, after all, take place; better for me to turn, and at once face the foe!

I had half resolved—was about to turn, in fact—when an object flashed before my eyes that dazzled them. Inadvertently I had run in the direction of the pond; I was now upon its edge. It was the sun gleaming from the water that had dazzled me—for the surface was calm as a mirror.

A new idea—a sort of half-hope—rushed into my mind. It was the straw to the drowning man. The fierce brute was close behind me; another instant, and we must have grappled.

"Not yet, not yet," thought I. "I shall fight him in the water—in the deep water; that may give me an advantage. Perhaps, then, the contest will be more equal; perhaps I may escape by diving." I sprang in without a moment's hesitation.

The water was knee-deep. I plunged onward, making for the center; the spray rose round me; the pond deepened as I advanced; I was soon up to the waist.

I glanced around with anxious heart; the bear was standing upon the shore. To my surprise and joy, I saw that he had halted, and seemed disinclined to follow me.

I watched his every movement. He had risen upon his hind-quarters, and in this attitude stood looking after me, but still apparently without any intention of taking to the water.

After regarding me for some moments, he fell back upon all-fours, and commenced running round the border of the pond, as if search for a place to enter.

There were still not over two hundred paces between us, for the pond was only twice that in diameter. He could easily have reached me, had he felt so disposed; but for some reason or other, he seemed disinclined to a "swim," though for nearly half an hour he kept running backward and forward along the shore.

Now and then he made short excursions out into the prairie; but always returned again, and regarded me afresh, as though determined not to lose sight of me for any length of time. I was in hopes that he might stray round to the other side of the pond, and give me the chance of making a rush for the ravine; but no; he continued on that side where he had first appeared, as though he suspected my design.

I knew not how long the siege was to last; but as I well understood the implacable disposition of the grizzly bear, I could not hope that the scene would be otherwise than protracted.

It lasted a long while—more than an hour I should think. I began to despair. I shivered. The pond must have been a spring, so chill were its waters. I shivered, but kept my place; I dared not move out of it. I even feared to agitate the water around me, lest by doing so I might excite my fierce enemy, and tempt his onset. I shivered, but stood still.

My patience was at length rewarded. The bear, making one of his short tours into the prairie, espied the carcass of the antelope. I saw that he had halted over something, though I could not tell what, for my eyes were below the level of the plain.

Presently his head was raised again, and in his jaws were the remains of the prong horn. To my joy I perceived that he was dragging it toward the barranca, and in another minute he had disappeared with it behind the cliff.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TOUGHEST STRUGGLE OF MY LIFE.

I SWAM a few strokes, and then wading gently and without noise, I stood upon the sandy shore.

With shivering frame and dripping garments. I stood, uncertain what course to pursue. I was on the opposite side of the lake—I mean opposite to where I had entered it. I had

chosen that side intentionally, lest the bear should suddenly return. He might deposit the carcass in his lair, and come back to look after me. It is a habit of these animals, when not pressed by immediate hunger, to bury their food or store it in their caves. Even the devouring of the little antelope would have been an affair of only a few minutes' time, and the bear might still return, more ravenous that he had tasted blood.

I was filled with irresolution. Should I run off across the plain beyond the reach of pursuit? I should have to return again for my horse and rifle. To take to the prairie on foot would be like going to sea without a boat. Even had I been sure of reaching the settlements in safety without my horse, I could not think of leaving him behind. I loved my Moro too well for that; I would have risked life itself rather than part with the noble creature. No; the idea of deserting him was not entertained for a moment.

But how was I to join him? The only path by which I could cross the barranca had just been taken by the bear. The latter was no doubt still upon it, in the bottom of the ravine. To attempt passing over would be to bring myself once more under the eyes of the fierce brute and I should certainly become his victim.

Another idea suggested itself—to go up the barranca, and find a crossing, or else head the chasm altogether, and come down upon the opposite side. That was possibly the best plan to pursue.

I was about starting forward to execute it, when, to my dismay, I again beheld the bear; this time, not upon the same side with myself, but upon the opposite one, where Moro was picketed!

He was just climbing out of the ravine when I first saw him—slowly dragging his huge body over the escarpment of the cliff. In a moment he stood erect upon the open plain.

I was filled with a new consternation; I perceived too surely that he was about to attack the horse!

The latter had already observed the bear's approach, and seemed to be fully aware of his danger. I had staked him at the distance of about four hundred yards from the barranca, and upon a lazo of about twenty in length. At sight of the bear he had run out to the end of his trail rope, and was snorting and plunging with affright.

This new dilemma arrested me, and I stood with anxious feelings to watch the result. I had no hope of being able to yield the slightest aid to my poor horse—at least none occurred to me at the moment.

The bear made directly toward him, and my heart throbbed wildly as I saw the brute approach almost within clawing distance. The horse sprang round, however, and galloped upon a circle of which the lazo was the radius. I knew, from the hard jerks he had already given to the rope, that there was no chance of its yielding and freeing him. No; it was a raw-hide lazo of the toughest thong. I knew its power, and I remembered how firmly I had driven home the picket-pin. This I now regretted. What would I have given to have been able at that moment to draw the blade of my knife across that rope!

I continued to watch the struggle with a painful feeling of suspense. The horse still kept out of the bear's reach by galloping round the circumference of the circle, while the bear made his attacks by crossing its chords, or running in circles of lesser diameter. The whole scene bore a resemblance to an act at the Hippodrome, Moro being the steed, and the bear taking the part of the ring-master!

Once or twice, the rope circling round, and quite taut, caught upon the legs of the bear, and, after carrying him along with it for some distance, flung him over upon his back. This seemed to add to his rage, since, after recovering his legs again, he ran after the horse with redoubled fury. I could have been amused at the singular spectacle, but that my mind was too painfully agitated about the result.

The scene continued for some minutes without much change in the relative position of the actors. I began to hope that the bear might be baffled after all, and finding the horse too nimble for him, might desist from his attacks, particularly as the horse had already administered to him several kicks that would have discomfited any other assailant. These, however, only rendered the brute more savage and vengeful.

Just at this time the scene assumed a new phase, likely to bring about the denouement. The rope had once more pressed against the bear; but this time, instead of trying to avoid it, he seized it in his teeth and paws. I thought at first he was going to cut it, and this was exactly what I wished for; but no—to my consternation I saw that he was crawling along it by constantly renewing his hold, and thus gradually and surely drawing nearer to his victim! The horse now screamed with terror!

I could bear the sight no longer. I remembered that I had left my rifle near the edge of the barranca, and some distance from the horse; I remembered, too, that after shooting the antelope, I had carefully reloaded it.

I ran forward to the cliff, and dashed madly

down its face; I climbed the opposite steep, and clutching the gun, rushed toward the scene of strife.

I was still in time; the bear had not yet reached his victim, though now within less than six feet of him.

I advanced within ten paces, and fired. As though my shot had cut the thong, it gave way at the moment, and the horse with a wild neigh sprang off into the prairie!

I had hit the bear, as I afterward ascertained, but not in a vital part, and my bullet had no more effect on him than if it had been a drop of saipe-shot. It was the strength of despair that had broken the rope, and set free the steed.

It was my turn now—for the bear, as soon as he perceived that the horse had escaped him, turned and sprang upon me, uttering, as he did so, a loud scream.

I had no choice but fight. I had no time to reload. I struck the brute once with my clubbed rifle, and flinging the gun away, grasped the reader knife. With the strong, keen blade—the knife was a bowie—I struck out before me; but the next moment I felt myself grappled and held fast.

The sharp claws tore up my flesh; one paw was gripped over my hips, another rested on my shoulder, while the white teeth gleamed before my eyes. My knife-arm was free: I had watched this when grappling, and with all the energy of despair I plunged the keen blade between the ribs of my antagonist. Again and again I plunged it, seeking for the heart at every stab.

We rolled together upon the ground, over and over again. The red blood covered us both. I saw it welling from the lips of the fierce monster, and I joyed to think that my knife reached his vitals. I was wild—I was mad—I was burning with a fierce vengeance—with anger, such as one might feel for a human foe!

Over and over the ground in the fierce struggle of life and death. Again I felt the terrible claws, the tearing teeth; again sunk my blade up to the hilt.

Gracious Heaven! how many lives has he? Will he never yield to the red steel? See the blood!—rivers of blood—the prairie is red—we roll in blood. I am sick—sick—I faint—

CHAPTER XVI.

OLD COMRADES.

I FANCIED myself in a future world, battling with some fearful demon. No; those forms I see around me are of the earth. I still live!

I observed that the sun was going down; a buffalo robe, suspended upon two upright saplings, guarded his slanting rays from the spot where I lay. My serape was under me, and my head rested in my saddle, over which another robe had been laid. I lay upon my side, and the position gave me a view of all that was passing. A fire was burning near, by which were two persons, one seated the other standing. My eyes passed from one to the other, scanning each in turn.

The younger stood leaning on his rifle, looking into the fire. He was the type of a "mountain man," a trapper. He was full six feet in his moccasins, and of a build that suggested the idea of strength and Saxon ancestry. His arms were like young oaks; and his hand grasping the muzzle of his gun, appeared large, fleshless, and muscular. His cheek was broad and firm, and was partially covered with a bushy whisker, that met over the chin; while a beard of the same color—dull brown—fringed his lips. The eye was gray, or bluish gray, small, well set, and rarely wandering. The hair was light brown; and the complexion of his face, which had evidently once been blonde, was now nearly as dark as that of a half-breed. Sun-tan had produced this metamorphosis. The countenance was prepossessing; it might have been once handsome. Its expression was bold, but good-humored, and bespoke a kind and generous nature.

The dress of this individual was the well-known costume of his class—a hunting-shirt of dressed deer-skin, smoked to the softness of a glove; leggings reaching to the hips, and fringed down the seams; moccasins of true Indian make, soled with buffalo-hide (*parfleche*). The hunting-shirt was belted around the waist, but open above, so as to leave the throat and part of the breast uncovered; but over the breast could be seen the under-shirt, of finer material—the dressed skin of the young antelope, or the fawn of the fallow-deer. A short cape, part of the hunting-shirt, hung gracefully over the shoulders, ending in a deep fringe cut out of the buckskin itself. A similar fringe embellished the draping of the skirt. On the head was a raccoon-cap—the face of the animal over the front, while the barred tail, like a plume, fell drooping over the left shoulder.

The accouterments were a bullet-pouch, made from the undressed skin of a tiger-cat, ornamented with the head of the beautiful summer-duck. This hung under the right arm, suspended by a shoulder-strap; and attached, in a similar manner, was a huge crescent-shaped horn, upon which was carved many a strange souvenir. His arms consisted of a knife and pistol—both stuck in the waist-belt—and a long

rifle, so straight that the line of the barrel seemed scarcely to deflect from that of the butt.

But little attention had been paid to ornament in either his dress, arms, or equipments; and yet there was a gracefulness in the hang of his tunic-like shirt, a stylishness about the fringing and bead-embroidery, and an air of jauntiness in the set of the 'coon-skin cap, that showed the wearer was not altogether unmindful of his personal appearance. A small pouch or case, ornamented with stained porcupine-quills, hung down upon his breast. This was the pipe-holder—no doubt a *gaze d'amour* from some dark-eyed, dark-skinned damsel, like himself a denizen of the wilderness.

His companion was very different in appearance; unlike him, in almost every respect, unlike anybody in this world.

The whole appearance of this individual was odd and striking. He was seated on the opposite side of the fire, with his face partially turned toward me, and his head sunk down between a pair of long-lank thighs. He looked more like the stump of a tree dressed in dirt-colored buckskin than a human being; and had his arms not been in motion, he might have been mistaken for such an object. Both his arms and jaws were moving; the latter engaged in polishing a rib of meat which he had half-roasted over the coals.

His dress—if dress it could be called—was simple as it was savage. It consisted of what might have once been a hunting-shirt, but which now looked more like a leathern bag with the bottom ripped open, and sleeves sewed into the sides. It was of a dirty-brown color, wrinkled at the hollow of the arms, patched round the armpits, and greasy all over; it was fairly "caked" with dirt. There was no attempt at either ornament or fringe. There had been a cape, but this had evidently been drawn upon from time to time for patches and other uses, until scarcely a vestige of it remained. The leggings and moccasins were on a par with the shirt, and seemed to have been manufactured out of the same hide. They, too, were dirt-brown, patched, wrinkled, and greasy. They did not meet each other, but left bare a piece of the ankle, and that also was dirt-brown like the buckskin. There was no undershirt, vest, or other garment to be seen, with the exception of a close-fitting cap, which had once been catskin; but the hair was all worn off, leaving a greasy, leathery-looking surface, that corresponded well with the other parts of the dress. Cap, shirt, leggings, and moccasins, looked as if they had never been stripped off since the day they were first tried on, and that might have been many a year ago. The shirt was open, displaying the naked breast and throat; and these, as well as the face, hands, and ankles, had been tanned by the sun and smoked by the fire to the hue of rusty copper. The whole man, clothes and all, looked as if he had been smoked on purpose.

His face bespoke a man of sixty, or thereabout; his features were sharp and somewhat aquiline, and the small eyes were dark, quick, and piercing. His hair was black, and cut short; his complexion had been naturally brunette, though there was nothing of the Frenchman or Spaniard in his physiognomy. He was more likely of the black-Saxon breed.

As I looked at this man I saw that there was a strangeness about him, independently of the oddness of his attire. There was something peculiar about his head—something wanting.

What was it that was wanting? It was his ears!

There is something awful in a man without his ears. It suggests some horrid drama—some terrible scene of cruel vengeance: it suggests the idea of crime committed and punishment inflicted.

I might have had such unpleasant imaginings, but that I chanced to know why those ears were wanting. I remembered the man who was sitting before me.

It seemed a dream, or rather the re-enactment of an old scene. Years before I had seen that individual, and for the first time, in a situation very similar. My eyes first rested upon him, seated as he was now, over a fire, roasting and eating. The attitude was the same; the *tout ensemble* in no respect different. There was the same greasy catskin cap, the same scant leggings, the same brown buckskin covering over the lanky frame. Perhaps neither shirt nor leggings had been taken off since I last saw them. They appeared no dirtier, however; that was not possible. Nor was it possible, having once looked upon the wearer, ever to forget him. I remembered him at a glance—Reuben Rawlings, or "Old Rube," as he was more commonly called, one of the most celebrated of trappers.

The younger man was "Bill Garey," another celebrity of the same profession, and Old Rube's partner and constant companion.

My heart gladdened at the sight of these old acquaintances. I knew I was with friends.

I was about to call out to them when my eye, wandering beyond, rested upon the group of horses, and what I saw startled me from my recumbent position.

There was Rube's old, blind, bare-ribbed,

high-boned, long-eared mare-mustang. Her lank grizzled body, naked tail, and mulish look, I remembered well. There, too, was the large powerful horse of Garey, and there was my own steed Moro picketed beside them. This was a joyful surprise to me, as he had galloped off after his escape from the bear, and I had felt anxious about recovering him.

But it was not the sight of Moro that caused me to start with astonishment; it was at seeing another well remembered animal—another horse. Was I mistaken? Was it an illusion? Were my eyes or my fancy again mocking me?

No! It was a reality. There was the noble form, the graceful and symmetrical outlines, the smooth coat of silver white, the flowing tail, the upright jetty ears—all were before my eyes. It was he—the white steed of the prairies!

CHAPTER XVII.

A QUEER CONVERSATION.

THE surprise, with the exertion I had made in raising myself, overcame me, and I fell back in a swoon.

It was but a momentary dizziness, and in a short while I was again conscious.

Meanwhile, the two men had approached, and having applied something cold to my temples, stood near me conversing. I heard every word.

"Durn the weemen!" (I recognized Rube's voice.) "thur allers a-gittin' a fellur into some scrape. Hyur's a putty pickle to be in, an' all through a gurl. Durn the weemen, sez I!"

"We-ell," drawlingly responded Garey, "prehaps he loves the gal. They sez she's mighty hansum. Love's a strong feelin', Rube."

Although I had my eyes partially open, I could not see Rube, as he was standing behind the suspended robe; but a gurgling, clucking sound—somewhat like that made in pouring water from a bottle—reached my ears, and told me what effect Garey's remark had produced upon his companion.

"Cuss me, Bill!" the latter at length rejoined—"cuss me! ef yur ain't as durned a fool as the young feller hisself! Love's a strong feelin'! He, he, he—ho, ho, hoo! Wal, I guess it must a be to make sich dodrotted fools o' reezun-able men. As yit, it hain't afooled this child, I reck'n."

"You never knewd what love war, old hoss?"

"Thur yur off o' the trail, Bill-ee. I did once't—yis; once't I wur in love, plum to the toe-nails. But that wur a gurl to git sweet on. Ye-es, thet she wur, an' no mistake!"

This speech ended in a sigh that sounded like the blowing of a buffalo.

"Who wur the gal?" inquired Garey, after a pause. "White or Injun?"

"Injun!" exclaimed Rube, in a contemptuous tone. "No, I reck'n not, boyee. I don't say thet, for a wife, an Injun ain't jest as good as a white, an' more convaynient she are to git shet of when yur tired o' her. I've hed a good grist o' squaws in my time—hef a dozen maybe, an' maybe more—but this I kin say, an' no boastin neyther, thet I never sold a squaw yet for a plug o' bacca less than I gi'n for her; an' on most o' 'em I made a clur profit. Thurfur, Billee, I don't object to a Injun for a wife. But wives is one thing an' sweethearts is diff'rent, when it comes to thet. Now the gurl I'm a-talkin' 'bout wur my sweetheart."

"She wur a white gal, then?"

"Are allyblaster white? She wur white as the bleached skull o' a buffler; an' sech ha'r! 'Twur as red as the brush o' a kitfox. Eyes, too. Ah, Billee, boy, them wur eyes to squint out o'! They wur as big as a buck's, an' as soft as smoked fawn-skin. I never see'd a pair o' eyes like hern!"

"What wur her name?"

"Her name wur Char'ty, an' as near as I kin remember, her other name wur Holmes—Char'ty Holmes. Ye-es, thet wur the name."

"'Twur upon Big-duck crick, in the Tennessee bottom, the place whur this child chawed his fust hoe-cake. Let me see—it ur now more'n thirty year ago. I fust met the gurl at a candy-pullin'; an' I recollex well we wur put to eat taffy ag'in' one another. We ate till our lips met; an' then the kissin'—thet wur kissin', boyee! Char'ty's lips wur sweeter than the treacle it-self!"

"We met once't ag'in at a corn-shuckin', an' arterwards at a blanket-trampin', an' thur's whur the bis'ness wur done. I see'd Char'ty's ankles as she wur a-trampin' out the blankets, as white an' smooth as peeled poplar. Arter thet 'twur all up wi' Reuben Rawlin's. I approached the gurl 'thout more ado; an' sez I, 'Char'ty,' says I, 'I freeze to you,' an' sez she, 'Reuben, I cottons to you.' So I immediately made up to the old squire—thet ur Squire Holmes—an' I axed him for his darter. Durn the ole skunk! he refused to gi'n her to me!"

"Jest then thur kum a pedlar from Kinneticut, all kivered wi' fine broadcloth. He made love to Char'ty; an' w'u'd yur b'lieve it, Bill? the gurl married him! Cuss the weemen! thur all alike."

"I met the pedlar shortly after, and gi'n him sech a larrupin as laid him up for a month; but

I hed to clur out for it, an' then I tuk to the plains.

"I never see'd Char'ty arterward, but I heerd o' her once't from a feller I kim across't on the Massoury. She wur a splendid critter; an' if she ur still livin', she must hev a good grist o' young-uns by this, for the fellur said she'd hed a kuppel o' twins very shortly arter she wur married, with ha'r an' eyes jest like herself! Wal, thur's no kalklatin' on weemen, anynow. Jest see what this young fellur's got by tryin' to sarve'em. Wagh!"

Up to this moment I took no part in the conversation, nor had I indicated to either of the trappers that I was aware of their presence. Everything was enveloped in mystery. The presence of the white steed had sufficiently astonished me, and not less that of my old acquaintances, Rube and Garey. The whole scene was a puzzle.

I was equally at a loss to account for their being acquainted with the cause that had brought me there. That they were so, was evident from their conversation. Where could they have procured their information on this head? Neither of them had been at the rancheria, nor in the army anywhere; certainly not, else I should have heard of them. Indeed, either of them would have made himself known to me, as a strong friendship had formerly existed between us.

But they alone could give me an explanation, and, without further conjecture, I turned to them.

"Rube! Garey!" I said, holding out my hand.

"Hillool yur a-comin' to, young fellur. Thet's right; but thur now—lay still a bit—don't worrit y'ursel; y'll be stronger by'm-by."

"Take a sup o' this," said the other, with an air of rude kindness, at the same time holding out a small gourd, which I applied to my lips. It was *aguardiente* of El Paso, better known among the mountain-men as "pass-whisky." The immediate effect of this strong, but not bad spirit, was to strengthen my nerves, and render me abler to converse.

"I see you recollects us, capt'n," said Garey, apparently pleased at the recognition.

"Well, old comrades—well do I remember you."

"We ain't forgot you neyther. Rube an' I often talked about ye. We hev many a time wondered what hed become o' you. We heered, of coorse, that you hed gone back to the settlements, and that you hed come into gobs o' property, an' hed to change y'ur name to git it—"

"Durn the name!" interrupted Rube. "I'd change mine any day for a plug o' Jeemes River bacca; thet w'd I, sartint."

"No, capt'n," continued the young trapper, without heeding Rube's interruption, "we hedn't forgot you, neyther of us."

"That we hedn't!" added Rube emphatically; "forgot ye—forgot the young fellur as tuk ole Rube for a grizzly! He, he! ho, ho, hoo! How Bill hyur did lart when I gi'n him the account o' that bissen in the cave. Bill, boy, I niver see'd you lart so in all my life. Ole Rube tuk for a grizzly! He, he, he!—ho, ho, hoo!"

And the old trapper went off into a fit of laughing that occupied nearly a minute. At the end of it he continued:

"Thet wur a kewrious bit o' dodgin'—wa'n't it, young fellur? You saved my ole karkidge thet time, an' I ain't a-gwine to forgit it; no, this child ain't."

"I think you have repaid me; you have rescued me from the bear."

"From one b'ar preehaps we did, but from t'other grizzly you rescued y'ursel; an', young fellur, you must 'a' fit a putty consid'able bout afore the varmint knocked under. The way you hev gi'n him the bowie ur a caution to snakes, I reck'n."

"What! were there two bears?"

"Look thur! thur's a kuppel, ain't thur?"

The trapper pointed in the direction of the fire. Sure enough, the carcasses of two bears lay upon the ground, both skinned and partially cut up!

"I fought with only one."

"An' thet wur enuf at a time, an' a leetle more, I reck'n. 'Tain't many as lives to wag thur jaws arter a stan'-up tussle wi' a grizzly. Wagh! how you must have fit, to 'a' rubbed out thet b'ar!"

"I killed the bear, then?"

"Thet you sartintly did, young fellur. When Bill an' me kim on the groun, the b'ar wur as dead as pickled pork. We thort y'ur case wa'n't any better. Thur you lay a-buggin' the b'ar, an' the b'ar a-buggin' you, as ef both on yur hed gone to sleep in a sort o' friendly way, like the babbies in the wood, exceptin' thet you wa'n't kivered wi' leaves. But thur wur y'ur claret a-kiverin' the paraira for yurds round. Thur wa'n't as much blood in you as w'd gi'n a leech his breakfast."

"The other bear?"

"She kam arterwards out o' the gully. Bill, he wur gone to look arter the white boss. I wur sittin' aside you, jest hyur, when I see'd the varmint's snout a-pokin' up. I know'd it war the she-b'ar a-comin' to see where Ole Eph had strayed to. So I tuk up Targuts, and plummed

the critter in the eye, and thet wur the end o' her trampin'.

"Now, looker hyur, young fellur! I ain't no doctur, neyther's Bill, but I knows enough about wounds to be sartint that you must lay still, an' stop talkin'. Yur mighty bad scratched, I tell ye, but yur not dangerous, only you've got no blood in y'ur body, an' you must wait till it gathers ag'in. Take another suet out o' the gourd. Thur now, come, Billee! leave 'im alone. Let's go an' hev a fresh tooth-full o' b'ar-meat."

And so saying, the leathery figure moved off in the direction of the fire, followed by his younger companion.

Although I was anxious to have a further explanation about the steed, the trappers' own presence, their knowledge of my wild hunt, and its antecedents—I knew it would be useless to question Old Rube any further after what he had said; I was compelled, therefore, to follow his advice, and remain quiet.

CHAPTER XVIII.

VOWS AND VENGEANCE.

I SOON fell asleep again, and this time slept long and profoundly.

It was after night-fall—in fact, near midnight, when I awoke. The air had grown chilly, but I found I had not been neglected; my serape was wrapped closely around me, and with a buffalo robe, had sufficiently protected me from the cold while I slept.

On awaking, I felt much better and stronger.

I looked around for my companions. The fire had gone out—no doubt intentionally extinguished, lest its glare amid the darkness might attract the eye of some roving Indian. The night was a clear one, though moonless; but the heaven was spangled with its sparkling worlds, and the starlight enabled me to make out the forms of the two trappers and the group of browsing horses. Of the former, one only was asleep; the other sat upright, keeping guard over the camp. He was motionless as a statue; but the small spark gleaming like a glowworm from the bowl of his tobacco-pipe, gave token of his wakefulness. Dim as the light was, I could distinguish the upright form to be that of the earless trapper. It was Garey who was sleeping.

I could have wished it otherwise. I was anxious to have some conversation with the younger of my companions; I was longing for an explanation, and I should have preferred addressing myself to Garey.

My anxiety would not allow me to wait, and I turned toward Rube. He sat near me, and I spoke in a low tone, so as not to awake the sleeper.

"How came you to find me?"

"By follerin' y'ur trail."

"Oh, you followed me then! From the settlements?"

"Not so far. Bill an' me wur camped in the chaparril, an' spied you a-gallupin' arter the white boss, as ef all the devils out o' b—wur arter you. I know'd yur at a glimp; so did Bill. Sez I; 'Bill, thet ur's the young fellur as tuk me for a grizzly up thur in the mountains,' and the reckoleckshun o' the eark'mstance sot me a-lart'n till my ole ribs ached. 'It ur the same,' sez Bill; an' jest then we met a Mexikin who hed been y'ur guide, gallupin' about in search o' you. He gi'n us a story 'bout some gurl thet hed sent you to catch the white boss; some saynora with a dodrotted long name. 'Durn the weemen!' sez I to Bill. Didn't I, Bill?"

To this interesting interrogatory, Garey, who was but half asleep, gave an assenting grunt.

"Wal," continued Rube, "seem' thur wur a pettycoat in the case, I sez to Bill, sez I: 'Thet young fellur ain't a-gwine to pull up till eyther he grups the boss, or the boss gits clur off.'"

"Now, I know'd you wur well mounted, but I know'd you wur arter the fastest critter on all these parairas; so I sez to Bill, sez I: 'Billee, thur boun' for a long gallup.' Sez Bill: 'Thet ur sartint.'"

"Wal, Bill and me tuk the idee in our heads thet you mout git lost, for we see'd the white boss wur a-makin' for the big paraira. It ain't the biggest paraira in creashun, but it ur one of the wust't to git strayed on. Y'ur greenborns wur all gone back, so Bill and me caught up our critters, an' as soon as we k'u'd saddle 'em, put arter you. When we kum'd out in the paraira, we see'd no signs o' you, 'ceptin' y'ur trail. Thet we follered up; but it wur night long afore we got half way hyur, an' wur obleeged to hal' till sunup."

"Wal—in the mornin' the trail wur nurly blind, on account o' the rain; an' it tuk us a good spell afore we reached the gully. 'Thur,' sez Bill, 'the boss hes jumped in, an' hyur's the trail o' the young fellur leadin' down the bank.' Wal, we war jest turnin' to go down, when we see'd y'ur own boss a good ways off on the paraira, 'thout saddle or bridle. We rid straight for him, an' when we got closter, we see'd some thin' on the groun' right under the boss's nose. Thet somethin' turned out to be y'ursel an' the grizzly, lyin' in grups, as quiet as a kuppel o' sleepin' possums. Y'ur boss wur a-squealin' like a bag o' wild-cats, an' at fust Bill an' me thort

you hed gone under. But upon a closter view, we see'd you wur only a-faintin', while the b'ar wur as dead as a buck. Of coorse we sot about docterin' you, to fotch you roun' ag'in."

"But the steed? the white steed?"

"Bill hyur grupp'd him in the gully. A leetle further down it's stopped up wi' big rocks. We know'd thet, for we'd been over this groun' afore. We know'd the boss k'u'dn't 'a' got over the rocks, an' Bill went arter an' foun' him, on a ledge whur he hed clomb out o' reech o' the flood; an' then he lazooed the critter, an' fotch'd 'im up hyur. Now, young fellur, you've got the bul story."

"An' the boss," added Garey, rising from his recumbent position, "he's yourn, capt'n. Ef you hadn't rid him down, I couldn't 'a' roped him so easy. He's yourn, ef y'u'll accept o' him."

"Thanks, thanks! not for the gift alone, but I may thank you for my life. But for you, I might never have left this spot. Thanks! old comrades, thanks!"

Every point was now cleared up. There was mystery no longer, though, from an expression which Garey had dropped, I still desired a word with him in private.

On further inquiry, I learned that the trappers were on their way to take part in the campaign. Some barbarous treatment they had experienced from Mexican soldiers at a frontier post, had rendered both of them inveterate foes to Mexico; and Rube declared he would never be contented until he had "plugged a score of the yellow-bided varmints." The breaking out of the war gave them the opportunity they desired, and they were now on their way, from a distant part of prairie-land, to take a hand in it.

The vehemence of their hostility toward the Mexicans somewhat surprised me—as I knew it was a recent feeling with them—and I inquired more particularly into the nature of the ill-treatment they had received. They answered me by giving a detailed account of the affair. It had occurred at one of the Mexican frontier towns, where, upon a slight pretext, the trappers had been arrested and flogged, by order of the commanding officer of the post.

"Yes-s!" said Rube, the words hissing angrily through his teeth; "yes-s, flogged!—a mountain-man flogged by a cussed monkey of a Mexikin! Ne'er a mind! ne'er a mind! By the 'tarnal God!—an' when I say thet, I sw'ar it—this nigger don't leave Mexiko till he hes rubbed out a soger for every lash they gi'n him—an' that's twenty!"

"Hyur's another, old boss!" cried Garey, with equal earnestness of manner—"hyur's another that sw'ars the same oath!"

"Yes, Billee, boy! I guess we'll count some in a skrimmage. Thur's two a'ready! looker thur, young fellur!"

As Rube said this, he held his rifle close to my eyes, pointing with his finger to a particular part of the stock. I saw two small notches freshly cut in the wood. I knew well enough what these notches meant; they were a registry of the deaths of two Mexicans, who had fallen by the hand or bullet of the trapper. They had not been the only victims of that unerring and deadly weapon. On the same piece of wood-work I could see long rows of similar *souvenirs*, apart from each other, only differing a little in shape. I knew something of the signification of these horrible hieroglyphics; I knew they were the history of a life fearfully spent—a life of red realities.

The sight was far from pleasant. I turned my eyes away, and remained silent.

"Mark me, young fellur!" continued Rube, who noticed that I was not gratified by the inspection; "don't mistake Bill Garey an' me for wild beasts; we ain't thet quite; we've been mighty riled, I reck'n; but f'r all thet, we ain't a-gwine to take revenge on weemen an' childer, as Injuns do. No—weemen an' childer don't count, nor men neyther, unless thur sogers. We've no spite ag'in the poor slaves o' Mexiko. They never did me nor Bill harm. We've been on one skurry, along wi' the Yutaws, down to the Del Nort settlements. Thur's wbur I made them two nicks; but neyther Bill or me laid a finger on the weemen an' childer. It wur becase the Injuns did, thet we left 'em. We've jest kum from thur. We want fa'r fight among Christyun whites; thet's why we're hyur. Now, young fellur!"

I was glad to hear Rube talk in this manner, and I so signified to him. Indianized as the old trapper was—with all his savageness, all his reckless indifference to ordinary emotions—I knew there was still a touch of humanity in his breast. Indeed, on more than one occasion, I had witnessed singular displays of fine feeling on the part of Rube. Circumstanced as he was, he is not to be judged by the laws of civilized life.

"Your intention, then, is to join some corps of rangers, is it not?" I asked after a pause.

"I shed like it," replied Garey; "I shed like to join your company, capt'n; but Rube hyur won't consent to it."

"No!" exclaimed the other with emphasis; "I'll jine no kump'ny. This nigger fights on his own hook. Yur see, young fellur, I hev been all my life a free mountaineeman, an' don't

understan' sogerin', nobow. I mout make some mistake, or I moutn't like some o' the reg'lar-shuns; thurfor I prefers fightin' arter my own fashun. Bill an' me kin take care o' ourselves, I reck'n. Kin we, Bill?—eh, boyee?"

"I guess so, old hoss," replied Garey, mildly; "but for all that, Rube, I think it would be better to go at it in a reg'lar way—partic'larly as the capt'n hyur would make the sogerin' part as easy as possible. W'u'dn't yur, capt'n?"

"The discipline of my corps is not very severe. We are Rangers, and our duties are different from those of regular soldiers—"

"It ur no use," interrupted Rube; "I must fight as I've allers fit, free to kum an' free to go whur I please. I won't bind myself to nuthin'. I moutn't like it, an' mout desart."

"But by binding yourself," suggested I, "you draw pay and rations; whereas—"

"Durn pay an' rashuns!" exclaimed the old trapper, striking the butt of his rifle upon the prairie. "Durn pay an' rashuns! Young fellur, I fights for revenge!"

This was said in an energetic and conclusive manner, and I urged my advice no further.

"Look hyur, Cap!" continued the speaker in a more subdued tone. "Though I ain't a-gwyne to jine yur fellurs, yet thur ur a favor I w'u'd axe from yur; an' that is, to let me an' Bill keep by you, or foller whuriver you lead. I don't want to sponge for rashuns; we'll git thet ef thur's a bead o' game in Mexiko, an' ef thur ain't, why we kin eat a Mexikin. Can't we, Bill?—eh, boyee?"

Garey knew this was one of Rube's jokes, and laughingly assented; adding at the same time, that he would prefer eating any other "sort o' a varmint."

"Ne'er a mind!" continued Rube; "we ain't a-gwyne to starve. So, young fellur, ef you agrees to our goin' on them terms, y'u'll have a kuppel o' rifles near you thet won't miss fire—they won't."

"Enough! You shall go and come as you please. I shall be glad to have you near me, without binding you to any term of service."

"Hooray!—thet's the sort for us! Kum, Billee!—gle's another suck out o' y'ur gourd. Hyur's success to the Stars and Stripes! Hooray for Texas!"

CHAPTER XIX.

MOUNTAIN MEDICINE.

My recovery was rapid. My wounds, though deep, were not dangerous; they were only flesh-wounds, and closed rapidly under the cauterizing influence of the *lechuguilla*. Rude as my doctors were, in the matter of such a malady, I could not have fallen into better hands. Both, during their lives of accident and exposure, had ample practice in the healing art; and I would have trusted either, in the curing of a rattlesnake's bite, or the tear of a grizzly bear's claw, in preference to the most accomplished surgeon. Old Rube, in particular, thoroughly understood the simple pharmacopoeia of the prairies; and his application to my wounds of the sap of the *pita* plant, obtained among the rocks of the ravine, bespoke his skill. This plant, a bromelia, is of the same genus as the *Agave Americana*, and by travelers often confounded with the latter, though quite a distinct plant from the *maquey* of cultivation. It grows in most parts of Mexico and South America, extending as far north as the latitude of 30°, and even further. There is no spot too arid or barren to give support to it. It is a true desert plant; and even on the naked rock, its curved and thorny blades may be seen radiating on all sides from the tall flower-stalk, that shoots upward like a signal-staff, to the height of twenty feet. As already observed, its uses are manifold; the fiber of its leaves can be manufactured into thread, cordage, and cloth; fences are constructed of the growing plant, and thatch of the blades when cut; its sap, distilled, furnishes the fiery but not unwholesome mezcal; and the large egg-shaped core or stem is eaten for food. Tribes of Indians—Lipans, Comanches, and Apaches—use it extensively as an article of diet. One branch of the great Apache nation are distinguished as "*Mezcaleros*" (eaters of the mezcal plant). They bake it in ground ovens of heated stones, along with the flesh of the wild-horse. It is firm when cooked, with a translucent appearance like candied fruits. I have eaten it; it is palatable—I might say delicious. The mastication of it is accompanied by a prickling sensation upon the tongue, singular to one unaccustomed to it. It is a gift of nature to the desert regions—where it grows in greatest luxuriance, and where it serves the same purpose in the economy of the savage natives as the *irias mesembryanthemums*, and *zambias* (the Caffre bread), upon the arid karroos of Southern Africa.

One of the most esteemed qualities of this bromelia is the cauterizing property of its juice—well known to the natives of the Mexican table-land, and to the Peruvians, where several species are found of like virtues. It will cause ordinary wounds to cicatrize in a few hours, and even "ugly gasbes" will yield to it in time.

My companions had full knowledge of its effects; and, having extracted the sap its large

succulent leaves, and boiled it to the consistency of honey, they applied it to my wounds. This operation they from time to time repeated, and the scratches were healed in a period marvelously short. My strength, too, was soon restored. Garey with his gun catered for the cuisine, and the ruffed grouse, the prairie partridge, and roasted ribs of fresh venison, were dainties even to an invalid.

In three days I was strong enough to mount; and bidding adieu to our camping-ground, we all three set forth, taking with us our beautiful captive. The trappers led him between them, secured to the saddles of both by a lasso.

We did not return in the direction of our old trail; my companions knew a shorter route—at least one upon which we should sooner reach water—and that is the most important consideration on a prairie journey. We headed in a more westerly direction; by which, keeping in a straight line, we expected to strike the Rio Grande some distance above the rancheria.

The sky was leaden-gray—the sun not being visible—and with no guide in the heavens, we knew that we might easily diverge from a direct course. To provide against this, my companions had recourse to a compass of their own invention.

On taking our departure from camp, a sapling was stuck into the ground, and upon the top of this was adjusted a piece of bear's-skin, which, with the long hair upon it, could be distinguished at the distance of a mile or more. The direction having been determined upon, another wand, similarly garnished with a tuft of the bear's-skin, was set up several hundred yards distant from the first.

Turning our backs upon these signal-pests, we rode off with perfect confidence, glancing back at intervals to make sure we were keeping the line. So long as they remained in sight, and aligned with each other, we could not otherwise than travel in a straight path. It was an ingenious contrivance, but it was not the first time I had been witness to the ingenuity of my trapper friends, and therefore I was not astonished.

When the black tufts were well-nigh hidden from view, a similar pair—the materials for which had been brought along—were erected; and these insured our direction for another stretch of a mile; then fresh saplings were planted; and so on, till we had passed over six miles of the plain.

We now came in sight of timber right ahead of us, and apparently about five miles distant. Toward this we directed our course, and before night reached the rancheria, safe and sound, to the great joy of the rangers.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WHITE CAPTIVE.

I FELT deadly weary, and scarcely undressing, I flung myself upon my leathern *catre*, and at once fell asleep.

A few hours' repose had the desired effect, and restored both the strength of my body and the vigor of my mind. I awoke full of health and hope. A world of sweet anticipations was before me. The sky and fortune were both smiling.

I made my toilette with some care—my *desayuna* with less—and then, with lighted cigar, ascended to my favorite lounge on the *azotea*.

The beautiful captive was in the midst of a crowd, proudly curving his neck, as if conscious of the admiration he excited. The rangers, the poblanas, the bucksters of the plaza, even some sulky leperos, stood near, gazing with wondering eyes upon the wild-horse.

"Splendid present!" thought I—"worthy the acceptance of a princess!"

It had been my intention to make the offering in person—hence the care bestowed upon my toilette. After more mature reflection, I abandoned this design.

I was influenced by a variety of considerations—one among others, being a delicate apprehension that a personal visit from me might compromise the family at the hacienda. The patriotic sentiment was every day growing more intense. Even the acceptance of a present was a dangerous matter; but the steed was not to be a gift—only a return for the favorite that had fallen by my hand—and I was not to appear in the character of a donor.

My sable groom, therefore, would convey the beautiful captive. Already the white lazo, formed into a halter, was adjusted around the animal's head, and the negro only awaited orders to lead him away.

I confess that at that moment I felt somewhat annoyed at the publicity of my affair. My rough rangers were men of keen intelligence. I could tell from some whispers that had reached me, that one and all of them knew why I had gone upon the wild hunt, and I dreaded their good-humored satire. I would have given something at that moment to have rendered the steed invisible—to have been able to transport him to his destination, Venus-like, under cover of a cloud. I thought of waiting for the friendly shelter of night.

Just then, however, an incident occurred which gave me the very opportunity I wanted

—a scene so ludicrous, that the steed was no longer the cynosure of admiring eyes.

The hero of this scene was Dajah Quackenboss.

Of all the men in my band, "Dutch Lige" was the worst clad. Not that there was less money expended upon his outward man; but partly from his ungainly form and loose untidy habits, and more, perhaps, from the wear and tear caused by his botanizing excursions, a suit of broadcloth did not keep sound upon him for a week. He was habitually in tatters.

The skirmish of the night had been profitable to Lige; it was his true aim that had brought down one of the five guerrilleros. On his asserting this, his comrades had laughed at it, as an idle vaunt; but Quackenboss proved his assertion to be correct by picking his bullet out of the man's body, and holding it up before their eyes. The peculiar "bore" of his rifle rendered the bullet easy of identification, and all agreed that Lige had shot his man.

By the laws of ranger-war, the spoils of this particular individual became the property of Quackenboss; and the result was, that he had shaken off his tattered rags, and now appeared in the plaza in full Mexican costume—comprising calzoneros, and calzoncillos, sash and serape, jacket and glazed hat, botas with gigantic spurs—in short, a complete set of ranchero habiliments!

Never was such a pair of legs incased in Mexican velveteens—never were two such arms thrust into the sleeves of an embroidered jaqueta; and so odd was the *tout ensemble* of the ranger thus attired, that his appearance in the plaza was hailed by a loud burst of laughter, both from his comrades and the natives who stood round. Even the gloomy Indians showed their white teeth, and joined in the general chorus.

But this was not the end. Among the spoils, Lige had made capture of a Comanche mustang; and as his own war-horse had been for a long time on the decline, this afforded him an excellent opportunity for a remount. Some duty of the day had called him forth, and he now appeared in the plaza leading the mustang, to which he had transferred his own saddle and bridle. A fine handsome horse it appeared. More than one of his comrades envied him this splendid prize.

The laughter had scarcely subsided, when the order was given to mount; and with others, Quackenboss sprang to his horse. But his hips were hardly snug to the saddle, when the wicked Comanche "humped" his back and entered upon a round of kicking which seemed to exhibit every pose and attitude of equestrian exercise. First his hind feet, then his fore ones, then all together, could be seen glancing through the air. Now a hoof whizzed past the ear of the affrighted rider, now a set of teeth threatened his thighs, while every moment he appeared in danger of being hurled with violence to the earth. The sombrero had long since parted from his head, and the rifle from his hand; and what with the flapping of the wide trowsers, the waving of the loose serape, the dancing of the steel scabbard, the distracted motion of the rider's arms, his lank streaming hair, and look of terror—all combined to form a spectacle sufficiently ludicrous; and the whole crowd was convulsed with laughter, while the plaza rung with such shouts as "Bravo!" "Well done, Lige!" "Hooray for you, old beeswax!"

But what surprised his comrades was the fact that Quackenboss still kept his seat. It was well known that he was the worst rider in the troop; yet, despite all the doubling and flinging of his mustang, that had now lasted for several minutes, he was still safe in the saddle. He was winning golden opinions upon the strength of his splendid horsemanship. The rangers were being astonished.

All at once, however, this mystery was explained, and the cause of his firm seat discovered. One of the bystanders, sharper than the rest, had chanced to look under the belly of the mustang, and the next moment shouted out:

"Hoy! look yonder! by Geehorumi, his spurs are clinched!"

All eyes were lowered, and a fresh peal of laughter broke forth from the crowd as they perceived that this was in reality the case.

Lige, upon mounting—under the suspicion that the mustang was disposed for a fling—had clutched firmly with his legs; and there, on account of their extreme length, completely enveloped the body of the animal, so that his heels met underneath. He had forgotten his new spurs, the rowels of which, six inches in diameter, irritated the mustang, and were no doubt the cause of such violent kicking. These, after a few tarsas, had got "locked," and of course held Quackenboss as firmly as if he had been strapped to the saddle. But as the rowels were now buried in the ribs of the mustang, the fierce brute, maddened with the pain, only grew more furious at each fling, and it was natural enough he should do his utmost to rid himself of so cruel a rider.

How long he might have kept up the pitching frolic before his involuntary tormentor could have freed himself, is a matter of conjecture. It would have been an unfortunate "fix" to have been placed in alone upon the prairies.

Lige, however, found a compassionate bystander, who, having flung his lasso around the neck of the mustang, brought the spectacle to a termination.

I dispatched the black upon his interesting errand, and with no slight anxiety awaited the result.

From my position on the roof, I saw my messenger climb the hill, leading the proud steed, and saw him enter the great portal of the hacienda.

Promptly—almost directly—the groom came out again without the horse. The present had been accepted. So far well.

I counted the moments, till heavy footsteps were heard upon the escalera, and a shining black face rose over the roof.

There was no letter, no message beyond "*Mil gracias*."

I felt a pang of chagrin. I had expected thanks more formal than this mere phrase of compliment.

My man appeared better satisfied. A gold *onza* gleamed in his purple palm—a handsome perquisite.

"By whom given?" I inquired.

"Golly, mass' cap'n, a gal giv it! De hand-somest quaderoom gal dis nigga ever see."

Beyond a doubt, Isolina herself was the donor!

I could have broken the rascal's thick skull, but that the queenly *douceur* gave proof of the satisfaction with which my offering had been received. Even on this trivial circumstance, I built my hopes of yet receiving a fuller meed of thanks.

I had given orders for my horse to be saddled, intending to ride forth and seek repose for my spirit amid the silent glades of the chaparral.

While waiting for my steed, an object came under my eyes that quickened the beatings of my pulse; my gaze had been long turned in one direction—upon the hacienda of Don Ramon de Vargas.

Just then, I saw emerging from its gate, and passing rapidly down the hill, a horse with a rider upon his back.

The snow-white color of this horse, and the scarlet manga of the rider—both contrasting with the green of the surrounding landscape—could not escape observation even at that distance, and my eyes at once caught the bright object.

I hesitated not to form my conclusion. It was the white steed I saw; and the rider—I remember the manga as when first my eyes rested upon that fair form—the rider was Isolina.

She was passing down the slope that stretched from the hacienda to the river, and the minute after, the thick foliage of the platanus trees shrouded the shining meteor from my sight.

I noticed that she halted a moment on the edge of the woods, and fancied that she gazed earnestly toward the village; but the road she had taken led almost in the opposite direction.

I chafed with impatience for my horse. My resolve, made on the impulse of the moment, was to follow the white steed and his scarlet-clad rider.

Once in the saddle I hurried out of the plaza, passed the ranchos of yucca, and reaching the open country, pressed my horse into a gallop.

My road lay up the river, through a heavily-timbered bottom of gum and cottonwoods. These were thickly beset with the curious *tillandsia*, whose silvery festoons, stretching from branch to branch, shrouded the sun, causing among the tree-tops the obscurity of twilight.

In the midst of one of these shadowy aisles, I met or passed some one: I saw that it was a Mexican boy; but the somber light, and the rapidity with which I was riding, prevented me from noting anything more. The lad shouted after me, uttering some words, which which were drowned by the hoof-strokes of my horse. I deemed it some expression of boyish *esprit*, and, without heeding it, rode on.

Not until far out of sight and hearing did it occur to me that I knew the voice and the lad. I recollected a sort of errand-boy attached to the hacienda, and whom I had seen more than once at the rancharia. I now remembered the badinage of Wheatley, and would have returned to question the youth, but I had left him too far in the rear. After a moment's reflection, I spurred on.

I soon arrived at the base of the hill on which stood the hacienda; and here leaving the main road, I followed a bridle-path that skirted the hill.

A few hundred yards brought me to the spot where I had last observed the object of my pursuit.

The hoof-track of the white horse now guided me, and upon his trail I entered the woods.

For some distance it followed a well-trodden path—a cattle track—but all at once it diverged from this, and struck off into a heavily-timbered bottom, where not the semblance of path existed.

Keeping the trace in view, I rode after.

As I advanced, the timber grew thicker, and the path the more difficult. A close underwood

of arundinaria and sabal palms shut up the way and the view; trailing roots obstructed progress below; while higher up, the trelliswork of lianas, bamboo briars, sarsaparilla, and gigantic grape-vines, rendered it necessary to bend down in the saddle in order to pass onward.

To my surprise I noticed all this. For what purpose could she have chosen such a path? Was it indeed Isolina I had seen? A white horse and a scarlet manga are not uncommon things in Mexico. It might not be—But the hoof print—

I dismounted and examined it: I knew it at a glance—it was that of the noble steed, and the rider could be no other than Isolina de Vargas.

No longer in doubt, though still wondering, I followed the tracks.

For a half-mile or so, the path meandered through thick forest, here turning around some giant trunk, there diverging to the right or left, to avoid the impervious network of canes and lianas.

At length it began to slope upward; and I perceived by the ascent that I was climbing a hill. The woods became more open as I advanced—here and there alternating with glades—the trees were of slender growth, and the foliage lighter and thinner. I was no longer among the heavy trunks of platanus and liquidambar. The *leguminosae* were the prevailing trees; and many beautiful forms of inga, acacia, and mimosa, grew around. Myrtles, too, mingled their foliage with wild limes, their branches twined with flowering parasites, as the climbing *combretum*, with its long, flame-like clusters, convolvuli, with large white blossoms, and the beautiful twin-leaved baubinia.

It was a wild garden of flowers—a shrubbery of nature's own planting. The eye, wandering through the vistas and glades, beheld almost every form of inflorescence. There were the trumpet-shaped bignonias—convolvuli in pendulous bells—syngenesists disposed in spreading umbels; and over them, closely set upon tall spikes, rose the showy blossoms of the bromelias—aloes and *dasylium*. Even from the tops of the highest trees hung gaudy catkins, wafted to and fro by the light breeze, mingling their sheen and their perfume with the floral epiphytes and parasites that clustered around the branches.

I could not help thinking that these flowers are gifted with life, and enjoy, during their short and transient existence, both pleasure and pain. The bright warm sun is their happiness, while the cold cloudy sky is the reflection of their misery.

I had advanced near the summit. The tracks were quite recent; the branches that had been touched by the flanks of the horse had not yet ceased to vibrate; the rider could not be far in advance. I fancied I heard the hoof-stroke.

Silently I pressed on, expecting every moment to catch the gleam of the scarlet manga, or the white sheen of the steed.

A few paces further, and both were under my eyes, glittering through the feathery frondage of the mimosas. I had followed the true track.

Spurring my horse into the open ground, I rode up and halted face to face with Isolina.

When we parted, we knew we loved each other.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN ADIOS.

OURS was a half-month of happiness without alloy. True, there were moments of pain—the moments of daily parting—but these were brief, and perhaps only prevented the cloyment of too much joy—if such a thing be possible. Moreover, these short-lived sorrows were in part neutralized by the knowledge we should soon meet again; we never parted without exchanging that fair promise. In the morning, it was "*hasta la tarde*," at night our last words were "*manana por la manana*." Lovers have felt, and poets have sung, the pleasures of hope; oft the anticipation of a pleasure rivals in piquancy its actual enjoyment.

Alas! there is an ending.

There was so. A crisis came, and we must part—not with the pret y promise upon our lips—"until the morning," "until the evening," but for long weeks, months, maybe years—an uncertain time—"hasta se acabo la guerra" (until the war is over).

Our troth was plighted within that same glade that had echoed our first vows. It had been plighted a hundred times, but never sadly as now, amidst sobs and tears. When the bright form, screened by the frondage, had passed out of sight, I felt as if the sun had become suddenly eclipsed.

It was a struggle between Aurora and the moon which of them should rule the sky, when our bugle rung its clear *reveille*, rousing the rangers from their slumber, and startling their steeds at the stall. The goddess of morning soon triumphed, and under her soft blue light, men and horses could be seen moving about,

until the bugle again sounded—this time to "boot and saddle"—and the rangers began to form in the plaza, and prepare for the route.

A single wagon with its white tilt and long team of mules, already "hitched up," stood near the center of the square. It constituted the whole baggage-train of the corps, and served as an ambulance for our invalids. Both baggage and sick had been safely stowed, and the vehicle was ready for the road. The bugler, already in his saddle, awaited orders to sound the "forward."

The bugle rung clear and loud, and its cheerful notes, as I sprung into the saddle, combined with the inspiration borrowed from my buoyant steed, produced a soothing effect upon my spirits.

It was but a short-lived light—a passing gleam—and soon again fell the shadow, dark as ever. Strive as I might, I could not cast the load that weighed upon my bosom; reason as I would, I could not account for its heaviness.

It was natural that a parting like ours should produce pain, and misgivings as to the future. My life was to be staked in the lottery of war; I might fall on the field of fight; I might perish by camp-pestilence—a foe that in the campaign kills more soldiers than sword or shot—the many perils of flood and field were before me, and it was natural I should regard the future with a degree of doubtfulness.

But it was not the contemplation of all these dangers that filled me with such a terrible foreboding. Strange to say, I had a forecast that I should survive them. It was almost a conviction, yet it failed to comfort me, for it comprehended not the safety of Isolina. No—but the contrary. Along with it came the presentiment that we should never meet again.

Once or twice, as this dread feeling became most acute, I reined up my horse, half resolved to gallop back; but again the wild idea passed from me, and I continued irresolutely on.

Something of prudence, too, now restrained me from returning; it would no longer have been safe to go back to the rancharia. As we issued from the plaza, we could hear distant jeering, and cries of, "*Mueran los Tejanos!*" It was with difficulty I could restrain the rangers from turning to take vengeance. One, the worse for mezcál, had loitered behind—under the influence of the drink fancying himself secure. Him the *pelados* had "bonneted," and otherwise maltreated. They would have murdered him outright, but that some of them, more prudent than their fellows, had counseled the mob to let him go—alleging that the Tejanos were yet "too near, and might come back."

Again I had strife with my men; they would have returned and fired the place had I permitted them. Fortunately, he who had been ill-treated was a good-for-nothing fellow—scarcely worth the sympathy of his comrades—and I was well satisfied at his having received a lesson. It might be useful, and was much needed, for "straggling" was one of the ranger-crimes most difficult to cure.

Along the road we saw signs of a guerrilla. Shots were fired at us from a hill; but a party sent to the place encountered no one. Horse-tracks were observed, and once a brace of mounted men were seen galloping away over a distant slope. It might be the band of Ijorra, and doubtless it was so; but we fancied at the time that Canales himself was near; and as an encounter with his large and well-organized force would be a very different affair from a skirmish with the other, we felt the necessity of advancing with caution.

The prospect of a "fight" with this noted partisan created quite an excitement in the ranks. To have captured Canales—the "*Chaparral Fox*," as the Texans termed him—or to have made conquest of his band, would have been esteemed a feat of grand consequence—only inferior in importance to a pitched battle, or the taking of "*Game-leg*" (Santa Anna) himself.

I confess that to me the idea of measuring strength with the famed guerrillero was at that moment rife with charms; and the excitement derived from the hope of meeting him for a while abstracted my mind from its painful bodings.

But we reached the town without seeing aught of the Chaparral Fox. It was not likely that he was on our road; or if so, he took care not to show himself. Canales fought not for glory alone, and the rangers were not the foes he cared to encounter. Rich baggage-trains were the game he was used to hunt; and our solitary "company-wagon," filled with frying-pans, camp-kettles, sick soldiers and tattered blankets—half alive with those charming little insects of the genera *pulex* and *pediculus*—had no attractions for the gallant guerrillero.

On reaching the town we were surprised to find that the division had not yet moved. It was to have marched on that morning; but a countermand had arrived from head-quarters, delaying the movement for some days—perhaps a week.

This was rare news to me; and as soon as I heard it, my mind became occupied with projects and anticipations of a pleasant nature. I had hoped that we should be sent back to the

rancheria, but alas! no—our orders were to remain with the division.

As every available building was occupied by troops, the rangers, as usual, were treated as "outsiders," and compelled to take to the grass.

Half a mile from the town a spot was shown us for our camp. It was on the banks of a pretty rivulet; and there, having picketed our steeds, stretched our canvas to the sun, and washed the dust from our faces, we made ourselves at home.

I did not remain long by the camp. As soon as the tents were fairly pitched, I left them, and walked back into the town—partly to get more definite information as to the future movements of the army, and partly with the design of indulging a little in the social feeling. I had some old comrades among the different regiments of the division; and, after such a long spell of rustication, I was not indisposed to refresh my spirit by the renewal of former fellowships.

At head-quarters I learned definitely that we should not march for a week at the least. So far good; and after hearing this, I proceeded to the *fonda*—the rendezvous of all the jovial spirits of the army. Here I encountered the friends of whom I was in search; and for a short while I found respite from the thoughts that had been harrowing me.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RUINED RANCHO.

THE pleasant excitement caused by my visit to my old comrades was soon over, and having nothing to do but lounge about my tent, I became again the victim of the same painful bodings. I could not shake them off.

As I lay stretched upon my leathern *catre*, I gave way to such reflections. I soon succeeded in reasoning myself into a full belief in foreknowledge; and my apprehensions were proportionately strengthened. But I had conceived a design; and the prospect of putting it into execution somewhat relieved me from the heaviness I had hitherto felt.

My new project was to take a score of my best men, to ride back the road we had come, place the party in ambush near the hacienda, while I alone should enter the house, and further urge the counsels I had committed to writing. If I should find that these had been already followed, so much the better—I should be assured, and return content; but I felt almost certain that Don Ramon had rejected them. At all events, I was determined to know the truth—determined, moreover, to gratify my longing for one more interview with my beloved.

I had warned the men and fixed the hour—as soon as it was dark enough to conceal our departure from the camp.

I had two reasons for not starting earlier—first, because I did not wish this private scouting to be known at head-quarters. It is true, that in such matters we rangers had the advantage of regular troops. Though belonging to the division, our duty was usually detached from it, and we were rarely "missed" when absent. There was thus a sort of pleasant independence in my command, which I for one fully appreciated. For all that, I did not desire the whole world to know of an expedition like the one projected.

My second motive for going in the night was simple prudence. I dared not take the whole of my command along with me without permission from head-quarters. The absence of the corps without leave would certainly be noticed—even were it but for a few hours—and with the smaller party I intended to take, caution would be requisite. Should we move along the road before it was deserted, some swift messenger might carry the tidings *en avant*, and get us into trouble.

I designed to start at the earliest hour of darkness—so that I might not alarm the hacienda by a midnight visit. An hour and a half of constant riding would bring me to its gate.

At the last moment of twilight we leaped into our saddles, and rode silently into the chaparral that skirted the camp. After flitting for some distance through a narrow path, we debouched upon the up-river road—the same that conducted to the rancheria.

The trappers, Rube and Garey, acting as scouts, went forward in the advance. They were on foot—their horses remaining behind with the party.

It was a mode of march I had adopted after much experience in bush-fighting. The scouts of a marching force should always go on foot, whether the main body be dragoons or infantry. In this manner they can take advantage of the ground; and by keeping under cover of the timber, are enabled to reconnoiter the angles of the road in a much safer way than when on horseback. The great danger to a scout—and consequently to the party for which he is acting—lies in his being first seen, and the risk is greater when he is mounted. The horse cannot be drawn under cover without an effort, and the sound of the hoof may be heard; whereas, in nine cases out of ten, a man on foot—that is,

such a man as either Rube Rawlings or Bill Garey—will discover the enemy before he is himself seen, or any ambuscade can be attempted. Of course the scout should never advance beyond the possibility of retreating upon the party he is guiding.

With full confidence in the men who had been sent forward, we rode on—timing our pace, so as not to overtake them. Now and then we caught a glimpse of them, at the further end of a long stretch, skirting the bushes, or stooping behind the cover, to reconnoiter the road in advance. To our chagrin, it was clear moonlight, and we could distinguish their forms at a great distance. We should have preferred a darker night.

The road we were traveling upon was entirely without habitations; most of it ran through light chaparral forest, with neither clearing nor homestead. One solitary rancho stood at about equal distances between the town and the rancheria, and was known among the rangers by the familiar sobriquet of the "half-way house." It was a poor hovel of yucca, with a small patch around that had once grown yams, chile-pepper, and a stock of maize for whoever had tilled it; but the occupants of the little rancho had long since disappeared—the prowling soldier-robber from the camp had paid it many a visit, and its household gods lay broken upon the hearth.

We had approached within less than half a mile of the ruined house, when a strange medley of sounds reached our ears. Human voices they were; and borne upon the light breeze we could distinguish them to be the voices of women. Occasionally harsher tones were heard mingling in the murmur, but most of them had the soft rich intonation that distinguishes the female voice.

We drew bridle and listened.

The sounds continued in the same confused chorus, but there was neither song nor joy in the accents. On the contrary, the night wind carried upon its wings the voices of "lamentation and wailing."

"There are women in trouble," remarked one of my followers, in a suggestive tone.

The remark caused all of us simultaneously to ply the spur and ride forward.

Before we had galloped a dozen lengths, a man appeared coming from the opposite direction, and advancing rapidly up the middle of the road. We saw it was the scout Garey; and, once more reining up, we awaited his approach.

I was at the head of the little troop, and as the trapper drew near, I could see his face full under the light of the moon. Its expression was ominous of evil tidings.

He spoke not until he had laid his hand upon the pommel of my saddle, and then only in a subdued and saddened tone. His words were:

"Thar's ugly news, capt'n."

Oh, that terrible foreboding!

"News?—ill news?" I stammered out; "what, for Heaven's sake?—speak, Garey!"

"They've been playin' the devil at the rancherie. Them ruff'ns hez behaved wuss than Injuns would 'a' done. But ride forrard, capt'n, an' see for y'urself. The weemen are clost by hyar at the shanty. Rube's a-tryin' to pacify them, poor critters."

Oh, that terrible foreboding!

I made no response to Garey's last speech, but rode forward as fast as my horse could carry me.

A brace of minutes brought me up to the rancho, and there I beheld a spectacle that caused the blood to curdle in my veins.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CRUEL PROSCRIPTION.

THE open space in front of the hovel was occupied by a group of women—most of them young girls. There were six or seven; I did not count them. There were two or three men, Mexicans, mixed up in the group. Rube was in their midst, endeavoring in his broken Spanish to give them consolation and assurance of safety. Poor victims! they needed both.

The women were half-naked—some of them simply *en chemise*. Their long black hair fell loosely over their shoulders, looking tossed, wet and draggily. There was blood upon it; there was blood upon their cheeks in seams half dried, but still dropping. The same horrid red mottled their necks and bosoms, and there was blood upon the hands that had wiped them. A red-brown blotch appeared upon the foreheads of all. In the moonlight it looked as if the skin had been burnt.

I rode closer to one and examined it. It was a brand—the fire-stamp of red-hot iron. The skin around was scarlet; but in the midst of this halo of inflammation I could distinguish, from their darker hue, the outlines of the two letters I wore upon my button—the well-known "U. S."

She who was nearest me raised her hands, and tossing back from her cheeks the thick clustered hair, cried out:

"*Miralo, señor! mira!*"

Oh, heaven! my flesh crept as I looked upon the source of that crimson hemorrhage. Her ears had been cut off—they were wanting!

I needed no further uplifting of their hair to satisfy me that the others had been served in like manner; the red stream still trickling adown their necks was evidence enough.

The men too had been similarly abused. Two of them had suffered still further mutilation. They held up their right arms before my face—not their hands. There were no hands! I saw the hanging sleeve and the blood-steeped bandage on the stump. Their hands had been chopped off at the wrists. Horrid sight!

Both men and women gathered around me, clasping my knees and uttering prayers and entreaties. No doubt most of them were known to me by sight, but their features were now unrecognizable. They had been the friends and sweethearts of the corps, and my followers were already addressing them by name. The lovers of one or two were present, sadly embracing them.

One appeared more richly costumed than the rest, and upon her my eyes had fallen as I first rode up. I almost dreaded to approach her, as she stood a little apart; but no—it could not be—she was not tall enough; besides, the ruffians would not dare—

"Your name, *senorita*?"

"*Conchita, señor—la hija del alcalde.*"

The tears burst from her eyes, mingling with blood as they ran down her cheeks. Oh, that I too could have wept! Poor Wheatley! he was not with us. He had yet to receive the blow. It would soon fall.

My heart was on fire; so were those of my followers. They swore and foamed at the mouth. Some drew pistols and knives, calling out to me to lead them on. Never saw I men in such a frenzy of rage; the most cold-blooded among them seemed to have suddenly gone mad.

I could scarcely restrain them till we should hear the tale. We guessed it already, but we needed some details to guide us in the execution of vengeance. It was told by many mouths, interrupting or confirming one another.

One of the men was more coherent—Pedro, who used to sell mezcal to the troop. To him we listened. The substance of his story was as follows:

Shortly after we had left the rancheria it was entered by the guerrilleros with cries of "Viva Santa Anna! Viva Mexico!" and "Death to the Yankees!" They commenced by breaking open the *tiendas*, and drinking mezcal and whatever they could find. They were joined by the mob of the place—by *luperos* and others. Pedro noticed the *herredero* (blacksmith) and the *matador* (cattle-killer) taking a conspicuous part. There were many women in the mob—the mistresses of the guerrilleros, and others of the town.

After drinking a while, they grew more excited. Then was heard the cry, "*Murran los Ayankieados!*" and the crowd scattering in different directions, entered the houses, shouting, "*Saqueños afuera! matenlos!*" (Drag them out! kill them!)

The poor girls, and all who had been friendly to the *Americanos*, were dragged into the plaza amidst the oaths and execrations of the guerrilla, and hissings and hootings from the mob. They were spit upon, called by filthy names, pelted with mud and melon-rinds, and then some of the crowd suggested that they should be marked, so that their friends the *Tejanos* should know them again. The suggestion was adopted; the women, more fiendish than the men, exciting the latter to the deed. Voices were heard calling to the blacksmith:—

"*Traiga el fierro! traiga el fierro!*" (Bring the branding-iron!)

Others cried out, "*Sacan las orejas!*" (Cut off their ears.)

The brutal blacksmith and butcher, both half-drunk, obeyed the call—willingly. Pedro alleged. The former used the branding-iron—already prepared—while the latter performed his bloody office with the knife of his trade!

Most of the guerrilleros wore masks. The leaders were all masked, and watched the proceedings from the roof of the *alcalde's* house. One Pedro knew in spite of his disguise; he knew him by his great size and red hair: it was the *salteador*, El Zorro. Others he guessed at; but he had no doubt it was the band of Don Rafael Ijurra—nor had we.

Had they left the rancheria before Pedro and the others came away?

Pedro thought not; he and the other victims, as soon as they got out of the hands of the mob, had fled to the chaparral, and were making for the American camp when met by our scouts. They were straggling along the road one after the other; Rube had detained them by the rancho, till we should come up.

Pedro feared that they were not all who had suffered—that there were other victims; the *alcalde*, he feared, had been worse than mutilated—he had been murdered.

This last information the poor fellow imparted in a whisper—at the same time casting a sorrowing look toward Conchita. I had not the courage to inquire further.

The question arose whether we should send back for more men, and wait till they arrived, or advance at once to the rancheria.

The former was negatived with unanimous voice. We were strong enough, and vengeance was impatient.

I was joyed by this decision; I could not have waited.

The women were directed to continue on to the ranger-camp; Pedro, mounted behind, one of the men, should go with us. We needed him for purposes of identification.

We were about to move forward, when a figure appeared along the road in the direction we were going to take. On coming within sight of us, the figure was seen to skulk and hide in the bushes.

Rube and Garey ran rapidly forward; and in a few minutes returned bringing with them a Mexican youth—another of the victims!

He had left the scene of his sufferings somewhat later than the rest.

Was the guerrilla still in the place?

No; they were gone from the village.

"Whither?" was the anxious interrogatory.

They had taken the up-river road, toward the hacienda de Vargas. They had passed the boy as he lay concealed among some magueys; he had heard their cries as they rushed past.

"What cries?"

They shouted: "*Mueran al padre y hija!*" (Death to father and daughter.)

"Oh, merciful God!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BIVOUAC OF THE GUERRILLA.

I STAYED to hear no more, but drove the spur against the ribs of my horse, till he sprang in full gallop along the road. Eager as were my men to follow, 'twas as much as they could do to keep up.

We no longer thought of scouts or cautious marching. The trappers had mounted, and were galloping with the rest. We thought only of time.

We rode for the hacienda de Vargas, straight up the river. Although it was beyond the rancharia, we could reach it without passing through the latter—which lay some distance back from the stream. We could return to the village afterward, but first for the hacienda. There I wished to arrive in the shortest time possible.

The miles flew behind us, like the dust of the road.

Oh, should we not be in time! I feared to calculate the length of the interval since the boy had heard that rabble rout. Was it more than an hour? Five miles to the rancho, and he on foot. Had he traveled rapidly? Yes, here and there; but he had made a stop; some men had passed him, and he had hidden in the bushes till they were out of sight. He had been more than an hour on the way—nearly two, and one would be enough for the execution of the darkest deed. Oh, we should not arrive in time!

There was no delay now. We were going at top-speed, and in silence, scarcely exchanging a word. Alone might be heard the clattering of hoofs, the clinking of bits, or the ringing of steel scabbards. Neither the slimy gutter nor the deep rut of *carreta* wheels stayed our advance; our horses leaped over, or went sweltering through them.

In five minutes we came to the *rinconada*, where the road forked—the left branch leading to the village. We saw no one, and kept on by the right—the direct road to the hacienda. Another mile, and we should reach the house; a quarter of that distance, and we should come in sight of it; the trees alone hindered our view of its walls. On—on!

What means that light? Is the sun rising in the west? Is the chaparral on fire? Whence comes the yellow gleam, half intercepted by the trunks of the trees? Is it not the moon?

"Ho! the hacienda is in flames!"

"No—it cannot be! A house of stone, with scarcely enough timber to make a blaze! It cannot be that!"

It is not that. We emerge from the forest; the hacienda is before our eyes. Its white walls gleam under a yellow light—the light of fire, but not of a conflagration. The house stands intact. A huge bonfire burns in front of the portal; it was this that caused the glare through the forest.

We draw up and gaze upon it with surprise. We behold a huge pile—the material supplied from the household stock of dry fagots—a vast blaze drowning the pale moonshine. We can see the hacienda, and all around it, as distinctly as by the light of day!

For what purpose this holocaust of crackling acacias?

Around the fire we behold many forms, living and moving. There are men, women, dogs, and saddled horses. Huge joints are roasting over the red coals, and others, roasted, are being greedily eaten. Are they savages who surround that blazing pile?

No—we can see their faces with full distinctness, the white skins and black beards of the men, the cotton garments of the women; we can see sombreros and serapes; cloth cloaks and calzoneros of velvet, sashes and sabers; we can distinguish their voices as they shout, sing, and carouse; we note their lascivious move-

ments in the national dance—the *fandango*. No Indians they—'tis a bivouac of the guerrilleros—the ruffians for whom we are in search!

Oh, that I had listened to the voice of prudence, and adopted the strategy of a surround! But my blood was boiling, and I feared to lose even a moment of time, lest we might be too late. But one or two of my followers counseled delay, and, as the event proved, they were the wisest. The rest, like myself, were impatient for action.

The word was given; and like hounds, fresh loosed from the leash, we rushed forward with charging cheer.

It was the madness of fools. Well knew our enemy the hoarse Texan "hurrah!" It had been shouted to terrify them, when there was no need. They would never have stood ground.

The shout warned them, causing them to scatter like a herd of deer. The steep hill proved too heavy for our horses; and before we could reach its summit, the main body of the guerrilla had mounted and scampered off into the darkness. Six of them fell to our shots; and as many more, with their she-associates, remained prisoners in our hands; but as usual that subtle coward had contrived to escape.

Pursuit was idle; they had taken to the dark woods beyond the hill.

I thought not of pursuit; my mind was bent on a far different purpose.

I rode into the patio. The court was lit up by the glare of the fire. It presented a picture of ruin. Rich furniture was scattered about in the veranda and over the pavement, broken or tumbled down. I called her name—the name of Don Ramon. Loudly and earnestly did I raise my voice, but echo gave the only reply.

I dismounted, and rushed into the veranda, still vociferating, and still without receiving a response.

I hurried from room to room—from *cuarto* to *sala*—from *sala* to *saguan*—up to the azotea—everywhere—even to the *capilla* in the rear. The moonbeams gleamed upon the altar, but no human form was there. The whole house was deserted; the domestics—even the women of the *cocina*—had disappeared. My horse and I seemed the only living things within those walls—for my followers had remained outside with their prisoners.

A sudden hope gleamed across my heart. Perhaps they had taken my counsel, and gone off before the mob appeared! Heaven grant it might be so!

I rushed out to question the captives. They should know, both men and women; they could certainly tell me.

A glance showed me I was too late to receive information from the men. A large *pecan* tree stood at one corner of the building. The firelight glared upon it; from its branches hung six human forms with drooping heads, and feet far from the earth. They had just ceased to live!

One told me that the herretero was among them, and also the cruel matador. Pedro had identified both. The others were *pelados* of the town, who had borne part in the affair of the day. Their judges had made quick work, and equally quick had been the ceremony of execution. Lazos had been reeved over the limbs of the *pecan*, and with these all six had been jerked up without shrift or prayer.

It was not revenge for which I panted. I turned to the women; many of these had made off, but there were still a dozen or more in the hands of the men. They looked haggard with drink; some snllen, and some terrified. They had reason to be afraid.

In answer to my questions, they shook their heads, but gave me no information. Some remained doggedly silent; others denied all knowledge of Don Ramon or his daughter. Threats had no effect. They either knew not, or feared to tell what had befallen them. Oh heaven! could it be the latter?

I was turning away angered and despairing, when my eyes fell upon a figure that seemed to skulk under the shadow of the walls. A shout of joy escaped me as I recognized the boy Cyprio, just emerging from his place of concealment.

"Cyprio!" I cried.

"*Si señor*," answered he, advancing rapidly to where I stood.

"Tell me, Cyprio, where are they gone—where—where?"

"*Carrai, señor!* these bad men have carried the *dueno* away; I do not know whither."

"The senora? the senora?"

"Oh! *cavallero!* es una cosa espantosa!" (It is a terrible thing.)

"Quick, tell me all! Quickly, Cyprio!"

"Senor, there came men with black masks, who broke into the house and carried off the master; then they dragged out Dona Isolina into the patio! Some went to the caballeriza, and led out the white horse—the steed that was brought from the *llanos*. Upon his back they bound Isolina. *Valga me dios!* such a sight!"

"Go on!"

"Then, senor, they led the horse across the river, and out to the plain beyond. All went along, to see the sport, as they said—*ay de mi!* such sport! I did not go, for they beat and

threatened to kill me; but I saw all from the hill-top, where I had hidden myself in the bushes. *O Santissima Maria!*"

"Go on!"

"Then, senor, they stuck *cohetes* in the hips of the horse, and set them on fire, and pulled off the bridle, and the steed went off, with fire-rockets after him, and Dona Isolina tied down upon his back—*pobre senorita!* I could see the horse till he was far, far away from the *llano*, and then I could see him no more. *Dios de mi alma!* la nina esta perdida! (Alas! the young lady is lost!)"

"Some water! Rube! Garey! friends—water! water!"

I made an attempt to reach the fountain in the patio; but, after staggering dizzily a pace or two, my strength failed me, and I fell fainting to the earth.

CHAPTER XXV.

TAKING THE TRAIL.

I HAD merely swooned. The shock of the horrid news was too much for my powers of endurance.

I was insensible only for a short while; the cold water revived me.

When consciousness returned I was by the fountain, my back leaning against its parapet edge; Rube, Garey and others were around me. From my dripping garments I perceived that they had drenched me, and one was pouring a fiery spirit down my throat.

There were men on horseback, who had ridden into the patio—the iron hoofs causing the court to ring. They were rangers, but not those who had left camp in my company. Some had arrived since, and others were still galloping up. The girls had reached the ranger camp, and told their tale. The men had not waited for orders, or even for one another, but rushing to their horses, took the road in twos and threes. Every moment a horseman, or several together, came riding forward in hot haste, carrying their rifles, as if ready for action, and uttering loud cries of indignation.

Wheatley had arrived among the foremost.

Poor fellow! his habitual buoyancy had departed; the gay smile was gone from his lips. His eyes were on fire, and his teeth set in the stern expression of heart-consuming vengeance.

Amid the hoarse shouting of the men, I heard screaming in the shriller voices of women. It came from without.

I rose hastily and ran toward the spot; I saw several of the wretched captives stripped to the waist, and men in the act of flogging them with mule quirts and pieces of rawhide rope.

I had feared it was worse; I had feared that their captors were inflicting upon them a retaliation in kind. But no—angry as were my followers, they had not proceeded to such a fiendish extremity.

It required all the authority of a command to put an end to the distressing spectacle. They desisted at length, and the screeching and affrighted wretches were permitted to take themselves away—all disappearing rapidly beyond the light of the fire.

At this crisis a shout was raised; "To the rancharia, to the rancharia!" and instantly a party, with Wheatley and Holingsworth at its head, rode off for the village. Pedro went along with them.

I waited not for their return; I had formed a plan of action for myself that would admit of no delay in its execution.

At first, stunned by the blow, and the distraction of my swooning senses, I had not been able to think; as soon as the confusion passed, and I could reflect more clearly, the course I ought to pursue was at once apparent. Vengeance I had felt as the first impulse, and a strong desire to follow up the fiend Ijurra—night and day to follow him—though the pursuit should lead me into the heart of the hostile ground.

This was but a momentary impulse; vengeance must be stifled for the time. A path was to be taken that widely diverged from that of the retreating guerrilla—the trail of the white steed.

Mounting Cyprio, and choosing from my band half a dozen of the best trackers, was the work of a moment. In another we were in the saddle, and, descending the hill, we plunged rapidly through the stream, crossed the skirting timber, and soon rode out upon the open prairie.

Under Cyprio's guidance, we found the spot desecrated by that cruel display. The ground was trampled by many hoofs; fragments of paper—powder-blackened—broken rocket-sticks and half-burnt fuses, strewed the sward—the pyrotechnic *reliquias* of the fiendish spectacle.

We halted not there. By the aid of our guide and the moonlight, we rode clear of the confusion; and taking up the trail of the horse, struck off upon it, and were soon far out upon the prairie.

For more than a mile we advanced at a gallop. Time was everything. Trusting to the intelligence of the Mexican boy, we scarcely scrutinized the track, but made directly for the point where the horse had been last seen.

Cyprio's information did not deceive us. A *motte* of timber had served him as a mark; the steed had passed close to its edge. Beyond it,

he had seen him no more, and the boy was sent back.

Beyond it, we had found the tracks, easily recognizable by Rube, Garey, and myself. There was a peculiarity by which we were prevented from mistaking them; three of the prints were clearly cut in the turf—almost perfect circles—the curve of the fourth—of the off fore-foot—was interrupted by a slight indentation, where a piece had been broken from the hoof. It had been done in that terrible leap upon the rocky bed of the barranca.

Taking the trail again, we kept on—now advancing at a slower pace, and with a greater degree of caution. Late rains had moistened the prairie-turf, and we could perceive the tracks without dismounting. At intervals, there were stretches of drier surface, where the hoof had scarcely left its impression. In such places, one leaped from the saddle, and led the way on foot. Rube or Garey usually performed this office; and so rapidly did they move along the trail, that our horses were seldom in a walk. With bodies half bent, and eyes gliding along the ground, they pressed forward like hounds running by the scent, but, unlike these, the trackers made no noise. Not a word was spoken by any one. I had no list for speech; my agony was too intense for utterance.

Despite my heart's bitterness, I could not help thinking of the Cossack legend. The famed classic picture came vividly before my mind. Wide was the distance between the Ukraine and the Rio Bravo. Had the monsters who re-enacted this scene on the banks of the Mexican river—had these ever heard of Mazepa? Possibly their leader had; but it was still more probable that the fiendish thought was original.

The fashion at least was. Cyprio had seen and described it.

She was laid longitudinally upon the back of of the steed, her head resting upon the point of his shoulder. Her face was downward, her cheek touching the withers. Her arms embraced the neck, and her wrists were made fast under the animal's throat. Her body was held in this position by means of a belt around her waist, attached to a surcingle on the horse—both tightly buckled. In addition to this, her ankles, bound together by a thong, were fastened to the croupe, with her feet projecting beyond the hips!

I groaned as I listened to the details.

The ligation was perfect—cruelly complete. There was no hope that such fastenings would give way. Those thongs of raw hide would not come undone. Horse and rider could never part from that unwilling embrace—never till hunger, thirst, death—no, not even death could part them! Oh, horror!

Not without groans could I contemplate the hideous fate of my betrothed—of her whose love had become my life.

I left the tracking to my comrades, and my horse to follow after. I rode with loose rein and head drooping forward; I scarcely gave thought to design. My heart was well-nigh broken.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TRAILING BY CANDLELIGHT.

WE had not gone far when some one closed up beside me, and muttered a word of cheer; I recognized the friendly voice of the big trapper.

"Don't be afeerd, capt'n," said he, in a tone of encouragement; "don't be afeerd! Rube an' me'll find 'em afore thar's any harm done. I don't b'lieve the white boss'll gallip fur, knowin' thar's someb'dy on his back. It war them gim-cracks that sot him off. When they burn out, he'll come to a dead halt, an' then—"

"And then?" I inquired mechanically.

"We'll get up, an' your black'll be able to overhaul him in a jump or two."

I began to feel hope. It was but a momentary gleam, and died out in the next instant.

"If the moon 'ud only hold out," continued Garey, with an emphasis denoting doubt.

"Rot the moon!" said a voice interrupting him; "she's a-gwine to giv out. Wagh!"

It was Rube who had uttered the unpleasant prognostication, in a peevish, but positive tone.

All eyes were turned upward. The moon, round and white, was sailing through a cloudless sky, and almost in the zenith. How, then, was she to "give out?" She was near the full, and could not set before morning. What did Rube mean? The question was put to him.

"Look ee'ander!" said he in reply. "D'ees see thet ur black line, down low on the paraira?"

There appeared a dark streak along the horizon to the eastward. Yes, we saw it.

"Wal," continued Rube, "thur's no timber thur—ne'er a stick—nor high groun' neyther: thurfor thet ur's a cloud; I've see'd the likes afore. Wait a bit. Wagh! In jest ten minits the durned thing'll kiver up the moon, an' make thet putty blue sky look as black as the hid o' an Afrikin nigger—it will."

"I'm afeerd he's right, capt'n," said Garey, in a desponding tone. "I war doubtful o' it myself: the sky looked too near. I didn't like it a bit: thar's always a change when things are better 'n common."

I needed not to inquire the consequences,

should Rube's prediction prove correct; that was evident to all of us. The moon once obscured by clouds, our progress would be arrested: even a horse could not be tracked in the darkness.

We were not long in suspense. Again the foresight of the old trapper proved unerring. Cumuli rolled up the sky one after another, until their black masses shrouded the moon. At first they came only in detached clouds, and there was light at intervals; but these were only the advanced columns of a heavier body, that soon after appeared; and without a break, spread itself pall-like over the firmament.

The moon's disk became entirely hidden from our view; ner scattered beams died out; and the prairie lay dark as if shadowed by an eclipse.

We could follow the trail no further. The ground itself was not visible, much less the hoof-prints we had been tracing; and halting simultaneously, we drew our horses together, and sat in our saddles to deliberate upon what was best to be done.

The consultation was a short one. They who formed that little party were all men of prairie or backwoods experience; and well versed in the ways of the wilderness. It took them but little time to decide what course should be followed; and they were unanimous in their opinion. Should the sky continue clouded, we must give up the pursuit till morning, or adopt the only alternative—follow the trail by torch-light.

"Ecoutez, mon capitaine!" cried Le Blanc, an old voyageur—"ecoutez! vy me no ride back, et von lanterne bring from ze ville Mexicaine?"

True, why not? We were yet but a few miles from the rancheria. The Canadian's idea was a good one.

"Je connais," he continued—"know I, pe gar! ze ver spot ou—vere—sont cachees—hid les chandelles magnifiques—von, deux, t'ree big candle—vax, vax—"

"Wax-candles?"

"Oui—oui, messieurs! tres grand comme un baton; ze ver chose pour allumer la prairie."

"You know where they are? You could find them, Le Blanc?"

"Oui, messieurs—je connais: les chandelles sont cachees dans l'eglise—zey are in ze church hid."

"Hal in the church?"

"Oui, messieurs; c'est un grand sacrilege, mon Dieu! ver bad; mais n'importe cela. Eef mon capitaine permis—vill allow pour aller Monsieur Quack'bosh, he go chez moi; nous chercherons; ve bring ze chandelles—pe gar va bring him!"

From the mixed gibberish of the voyageur, I could gather his meaning well enough. He knew of a depository of wax-candles, and the church of the rancheria was the place in which they were kept.

I was not in a frame of mind to care much for the sacrilege, and my companions were still less scrupulous. The act was determined upon, and Le Blanc and Quackenboss, without more delay, took the back track for the village.

The rest of us dismounted; and, picketing our horses to the grass, lay down to await the return of the messengers.

These did not linger. Two hours had been allowed them to perform their errand; but long before the expiration of that period, we heard the double tramp of their horses as they came galloping across the plain.

In a few minutes they rode up, and we could see in the hands of Le Blanc three whitish objects, that in length and thickness resembled stout walking-canes. We recognized *les chandelles magnifiques*.

They were the property of the church—designed, no doubt, to have illumined the altar upon the occasion of some grand *dia de fiesta*.

"Voilà mon capitaine!" cried the Canadian, as he rode forward—"voilà les chandelles! Ah! mon Dieu! c'est von big sacrilege, et je suis bon Chretien—buen Catolico, as do call'im ze dam Mexicaine; bien—ze bon Dieu me forgive—God ve pardon vill pour—for ze grand necessitie; sure certaine he will me pardon—Lige et moi—ze brave Monsieur Quack'bosh."

The messengers had brought news from the village. Some rough proceedings had taken place since our departure. Men had been punished; fresh victims had been found under the guidance of Pedro and others of the abused. The trees in the church inclosure that night bore horrid fruit.

The alcalde was not dead; and Don Ramon, it was supposed, still survived, but had been carried off a prisoner by the guerrilla! The rangers were yet at the rancheria; many had been desirous of returning with Le Blanc and Quackenboss, but I had sent orders to the lieutenants to take all back to camp as soon as their affair was over. The fewer of the troop that should be absent, the less likelihood of our being missed, and those I had with me I deemed enough for my purpose. Whether successful or not, we should soon return to camp. It would then be time to devise some scheme for capturing the leader and prime actor in this terrible tragedy.

Hardly waiting to hear the story, we lighted the great candles, and moved once more along the trail.

Fortunately, the breeze was but slight, and only served to make the huge waxen torches flare more freely. By their brilliant blaze we were enabled to take up the tracks, quite as rapidly as by the moonlight. At this point, the horse had been still going at full gallop; and his course, as it ran in a direct line, was the more easily followed.

Dark as the night was, we soon perceived we were heading for a point well known to all of us—a prairie mound; and, under a faint belief that the steed might have there come to a stop, we pressed forward with a sort of hopeful anticipation.

After an hour's tracking, the white cliffs loomed within the circle of our view—the shining selenite glancing back the light of our tapers, like a wall set with diamonds.

As the trappers conjectured, they found the tracks in the muddy margin of the spring-branch. The steed had drank at the pool; but immediately after had resumed his wild flight, going westward from the mound.

Why had he gone off at a gallop? Had he been alarmed by aught? Or had he taken fresh affright at the strange rider upon his back?

I questioned Garey. I saw that he knew why. He needed pressing for the answer.

He gave it at length, but with evident reluctance. These were his words of explanation: "Thar are wolf-tracks on the trail!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

WOLVES ON THE TRACK.

THE wolves, then, were after him!

The trackers had made out their footprints in the mud of the arroyo. Both kinds had been there—the large brown wolf of Texas, and the small barking coyote of the plains. A full pack there had been, as the trappers could tell by the numerous tracks, and that they were following the horse, the tracks also testified to these men of strange intelligence. How knew they this? By what sign?

To my inquiries, I obtained answer from Garey.

Above the spring-branch extended a shelving bank; up this the steed had bounded, after drinking at the pool. Up this, too, the wolves had sprung after; they had left the indentation of their claws in the soft loam.

How knew Garey that they were in pursuit of the horse?

The "scratches" told him they were going at their fastest, and they would not have sprung so far had they not been pursuing some prey. There were footmarks of no other animal except theirs and the hoof-prints of the steed; and that they were after him was evident to the trapper, because the tracks of the wolves covered those of the horse.

Garey had no more doubt of the correctness of his reasoning than a geometer of the truth of a theorem in Euclid.

That they might succeed in running down the steed, cumbered as he was, was probable enough. Sooner or later, they would overtake him. It might be after a long, long gallop over bill and dale, through swamp and chaparral; but still it was probable those tough, tireless pursuers would overtake him. They would launch themselves upon his flanks; they would seize upon his wearied limbs—upon hers, the helpless victim on his back—both horse and rider would be dragged to the earth—both torn—parted in pieces—devoured!

I groaned under the horrid apprehension.

"Look thar!" said Garey, pointing to the ground, and holding his torch so as to illuminate the surface; "the boss has made a slip thar. See! hyar's the track o' the big wolf—he has sprung up jest hyar; I can tell by the scratch o' his hind claws."

I examined the "sign." Even to my eyes it was readable, and just as Garey had interpreted it. There were other tracks of wolves on the damp soil, but one had certainly launched himself forward, in a long leap, as though in an effort to fasten himself upon the flanks of some animal. The hoof-mark plainly showed that the steed had slipped as he sprung over the wet grass; and this had tempted the spring of the watchful pursuer.

We hurried on. Our excited feelings hindered us from pausing longer than a moment. Both rangers and trappers shared my eagerness, as well as my apprehensions. Fast as the torches could be carried, we hurried on.

Shortly after parting from the mesa, there occurred a change in our favor; the clouds were fast driving from the face of the firmament. In five minutes more, the moon would shine forth. Already her refracted rays lightened the prairie.

We did not stay for her full beam; time was too precious. Still trusting to the torches, we hurried on.

The beautiful queen of the night kept her promise. In five minutes, her cheering orb shot out beyond the margin of the dark pall that had hitherto shrouded it; and her white disk, as if purified by the storm, shone with un-

wanted brightness. The ground became conspicuous almost as in day; the torches were extinguished, and we followed the trail more rapidly by the light of the moon.

Here, still in full gallop, had passed the wild-horse, and for miles beyond—still had he gone at utmost speed. Still close upon his heels had followed the ravenous and untiring wolves. Here and there were the prints of their clawed feet—the signs of their unflagging pursuit.

The roar of water sounded in our ears; it came from the direction toward which the trail was conducting us; a stream was not far distant.

We soon diminished the distance. A glassy sheet glistened under the moonlight, and toward this the trail trended in a straight line.

It was a river—a cataract was near, down which the water came tumbling, broken by the rocks into hummocks of white foam. Under the moonlight, it appeared like an avalanche of snow. The trappers recognized an affluent of the Rio Bravo, running from the north—from the high steppe of the Llano Estacado.

We hurried forward to its bank, and opposite the frothing rapids. The trail conducted us to this point—to the very edge of the foaming water. It led no further. There were the hoof-marks forward to the brink, but not back. The horse had plunged into the torrent.

Many a hundred yards had Moro swum with his rider on his back—many a current had he cleft with his proud breast far more rapid than that.

I headed him to the bank, gave him the spur, and went plunging into the flood.

Plunge—plunge—plunge! I heard behind me till the last of my followers had launched themselves on the wave, and were swimming silently over.

One after another we reached the opposite side, and ascended the bank.

Hurriedly I counted our number as the men rode out; one had not yet arrived. Who was missing?

"Rube," answered some one.

I glanced back, but without feeling any uneasiness. I had no fear for the trapper; Garey alleged he was "safe to turn up." Something had detained him. Could his old mare swim?

"Like a wink," replied Garey; "but Rube won't ride her across; he's afeard to sink her too deep in the water. See! yonder he comes!"

Near the middle of the stream, two faces were observed rippling the wave, one directly in the wake of the other. The foremost was the grizzled front of the old mustang, the other the unmistakable physiognomy of her master. The moonlight shining upon both rendered them conspicuous above the dark brown water; and the spectacle drew a laugh from those who had reached the bank.

Rube's mode of crossing was unique, like every action of this singular man. Perhaps he adopted it from sheer eccentricity, or maybe in order that his mustang might swim more freely.

He had ridden gently into the water, and kept his saddle till the mare was beyond her depth—then sliding backward over her hips, he took the tail in his teeth, and partly towed like a fish upon the hook, and partly striking to assist in the passage, he swam after. As soon as the mare again touched bottom, he drew himself up over the croupe, and in this way regained his saddle.

Mare and man, as they climbed out on the bank—the thin skeleton bodies of both reduced to their slenderest dimensions by the soaking water—presented a spectacle so ludicrous as to elicit a fresh chorus of laughter from his comrades.

I stayed not till its echoes had died away; but pressing my steed along the bank, soon arrived at the rapids, where I expected to recover the trail.

To my joy, hoof-marks were there, directly opposite the point where the steed had taken to the stream. Rube was right. He had waded safely across.

Thank heaven! at least from that peril has she been saved!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A BURNING PRAIRIE.

ON resuming the trail, I was cheered by three considerations. The peril of the flood was past—she was not drowned. The wolves were thrown off—the dangerous rapid had deterred them; on the other side their footprints were no longer found. Thirdly, the steed had slackened his pace. After climbing the bank, he had set off in a rapid gait, but not at a gallop.

"He's been pacin' hyar!" remarked Garey, as soon as his eyes rested upon the tracks.

I knew that gait peculiar to the prairie horse, fast but smooth as the amble of a palfrey. His rider would scarcely perceive the gentle movement; her torture would be less.

Perhaps, too, no longer frightened by the fierce pursuers, the horse would come to a stop. His wearied limbs would admonish him, and then—

Surely he could not have gone much further? We, too, were wearied, one and all; but these pleasing conjectures beguiled us from thinking

of our toil, and we advanced more hopefully along the trail.

Alas! it was my fate to be the victim of alternate hopes and fears. My new-sprung joy was short-lived, and fast fled away.

We had gone but a few hundred paces from the river when we encountered an obstacle that proved not only a serious barrier to our progress, but almost brought our tracking to a termination.

This obstacle was a forest of oaks, not giant oaks, as these famed trees are usually designated, but the very reverse—a forest of dwarf oaks (*Quercus nana*). Far as the eye could reach extended this singular wood, in which no tree rose above thirty inches in height. Yet was it no thicket—no undergrowth of shrubs—but a true forest of oaks, each tree having a separate stem, its boughs, its lobed leaves, and its bunches of brown acorns.

"Shin oak," cried the trappers, as we entered the verge of this miniature forest.

"Wagh!" exclaimed Rube, in a tone of impatience, "hyur's bother. 'Es may all get out o' y'ur saddles an' rest y'ur critturs; we'll hev to crawl hyur."

And so it resulted. For long, weary hours we followed the trail, going not faster than we could have crawled upon our hands and knees. The tracks of the steed were plain enough, and in daylight could have been easily followed; but the little oaks grew close and regular as if planted by the hand of man; and through their thick foliage the moonlight scarcely penetrated. Their boughs almost touched each other, so that the whole surface lay in dark shadow, rendering it almost impossible to make out the hoofprints. Here and there a broken branch or a bunch of tossed leaves—their under sides shining glaucous in the moonlight—enabled us to advance at a quicker rate; but as the horse had passed gently over the ground, these "signs" were few and far between.

For long, fretful hours we toiled through the "shin oak" forest, our heads far overtopping the tallest trees! We might have fancied that we were threading our way through some extended nursery. The trail led directly across its central part; and ere we had reached its furthest verge, the moon's rays were mingling with the purple light of morning.

We had worked our way about five miles through the jungle when I began to feel a strange sensation in the eyes—a sensation of pain—what is usually termed a "smarting." I at first attributed it to the want of sleep.

My companions complained that they were affected in a similar manner.

It was not until we had gone some distance further that we found the true explanation—on perceiving that there was smoke in the air! Smoke it was that was causing the bitterness in our eyes.

As we advanced, the glance of the men became more uneasy. Beyond a doubt, the smoke was thickening around us, the sky was fast becoming darker, and the pain in our eyes more acute.

"Ah, Monsieur Roob!" cried the Canadian, "vat make zees diable d'une fumee—smoke! Are ze woods on fire—you tink—eh?"

"Wuds!" exclaimed Rube, with a contemptuous glance at the speaker. "Wagh! Thur's no wuds hyur. Thur's a paraira afire. Don't yer smell the stink o' the grass?"

"Pe gar, oui! vraiment—c'est la prairie? You sure, Monsieur Roob?"

"Sure!" vociferated the trapper in a tone of indignation. "Sure! ye durned parley-voo-eat-a-frog-spit-a-brickbat-soup-suckin' Frenchman, d'yur think I don't know the smell o' a burnin' paraira? Wagh!"

"Ah, Monsieur Roob, me pardonnez. Vat I mean ask—is ze chaparral brule—on fire—ces arbres?"

"The chaparral ain't afire," answered Rube, somewhat mollified by the apology; "so don't be skeart, Frenchy, yur safe enuf."

This assurance seemed to gratify not only the timid Canadian, but others, who, up to this moment, were apprehensive that it was the thicket that was on fire.

For myself I had no such fears. I perceived that the chaparral could not burn. Here and there patches of dry mesquite trees would have caught like tinder, but in most places a succulent endogenous vegetation formed three parts of the jungle and rendered it "fire proof." This was especially the case around the glade where the trappers had taken their stand, and which was completely inclosed by a wall of the great organ cactus, with aloes, opuntias, and other juicy-leaved plants. In the opening we were as safe from the fire as though it were a hundred miles off; we suffered only from the smoke, that now quite filled the atmosphere, causing a darkness that rivalled night itself.

We were compelled to halt; even the smoke rendered further progress impossible; but we could hear the fire at no great distance—the culms of the coarse reed-grass cracking like volleys of musketry.

Now and then a scared deer broke through the bushes, passing us at full speed. A band of antelopes dashed into the glade and halted close beside us—the frightened creatures not know-

ing where to run. At their heels came a pack of prairie-wolves, but not in pursuit of them; these also stopped near. A black bear and a cougar arrived next; and fierce beasts of prey and gentle ruminants stood side by side, both terrified out of their natural habits. Birds shrieked among the branches, eagles screamed in the air, and black vultures could be seen hovering through the smoke, with no thought of stooping upon a quarry!

The hunter man alone preserved his instincts. My followers were hungry. Rifles were leveled—and the bear and one of the antelopes fell victims to the deadly aim.

Both were soon stripped of their skins and butchered. A fire was kindled in the glade, and upon sword-blades and sapling spits the choice morsels of venison and "bear-meat" were roasted and eaten, with many a jest about the "snooky kitchen."

I was myself hungered. I shared the repast, but not the merriment. At that moment no wit could have won from me a smile; the most luxurious table could not have furnished me with cheer.

A worse appetite than hunger assailed my companions, and I felt it with the rest—it was thirst. For hours all had been suffering from it. The long, hard ride had brought it on, and now the smoke and the dry, hot atmosphere increased the appetite till it had grown agonizing, almost unendurable. No water had been passed since the stream we had crossed before day; there was none in the chaparral; the trackers saw none so far as they had gone. We were in a waterless desert; and the very thought itself renders the pang of thirst keener and harder to endure.

Some chewed their leaden bullets, or pebbles of chalcedony which they had picked up; others obtained relief by drinking the blood of the slaughtered animals—the bear and the antelope—but we found a better source of assuagement in the succulent stems of the cactus and agave.

The relief was but temporary. The juice cooled our lips and tongues, but there is an acid principle in some of these plants that soon acted, and our thirst became more intense than ever.

Some talked of returning on the trail in search of water—of going back to the stream, more than twenty miles distant.

Under such circumstances, even military command loses its authority. Nature is stronger than martial law.

I cared not if they did return; I cared not who left me, so long as the trappers remained true. I had no fear that they would forsake me; and my disapprobation of it checked the cheerless proposal, and once more all declared their willingness to go on.

Fortunately, at that crisis the smoke began to clear away, and the atmosphere to lighten up. The fire had burnt on to the edge of the chaparral, where it was now opposed by the sap-bearing trees. The grass had been all consumed—the conflagration was at an end.

Mounting our horses, we rode out from the glade; and following the trail a few hundred yards further, we emerged from the thicket, and stood upon the edge of the desolated plain.

The trackers had already ridden far out, and were advancing. After awhile I observed them moving more slowly, their eyes upon the ground, as if they had lost the trail. But I saw that, after searching a few seconds, they had taken it up, and were once more moving along, guided by the tracks.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TALK OF THE TRACKERS.

I SPURRED after, and soon overtook them. Regardless of the dust, I rode close in the rear of the trackers, and listened to what they were saying.

These "men of the mountains"—as they prided to call themselves—were peculiar in everything. While engaged in a duty, such as the present, they would scarce disclose their thoughts, even to me; much less were they communicative with the rest of my following, whom they were accustomed to regard as "greenhorns"—their favorite appellation for all men who have not made the tour of the grand prairies.

Notwithstanding that Stanfield and Black were backwoodsmen and hunters by profession, Quackenboss a splendid shot, Le Blanc a regular *voyageur*, and the others more or less skilled in woodcraft, all were greenhorns in the opinion of the trappers. To be otherwise, a man must have starved upon a "sage-prairie"—"run" buffalo by the Yellowstone or Platte—fought "Injun," and shot Indian—have well-nigh lost scalp or ears—spent a winter in Pierre's Hole upon Green River—or camped amid the snows of the Rocky Mountains! Some one of all these feats must needs have been performed, ere the "greenhorn" can matriculate and take rank as a "mountain man."

I of all my party was the only one who, in the eyes of Rube and Garey, was not a greenhorn; and even I—gentleman-amateur that I was—was hardly up either in their confidence, or their "craft." It is indeed true—with all my classic accomplishments—with my fine

words, my fine horse, and fine clothes—so long as we were within the limits of prairie-land, I acknowledged these men as my superiors. They were my guides, my instructors, my masters.

Since overtaking them on the trail, I had not asked them to give any opinion. I dreaded a direct answer—for I had noticed something like a despairing look in the eyes of both.

As I followed them over the black plain, however, I thought that their faces brightened a little, and appeared once more lit up by a faint ray of hope. For that reason, I rode close upon their heels, and eagerly caught up every word that was passing between them. Rube was speaking when I first drew near.

"Wagh! I don't b'lieve it, Bill; 'tain't possible no how-so-ever. The paraira wur sot afire—must 'a' been—thur's no other ways for it. It e'dn't 'a' tuk to bleezin' o' itself—eh?"

"Sart'lnly not; I agree wi' you, Rube."

"Wal—thur wur a fellar as I met onces at Bent's Fort on the Arkinsaw—a odd sort o' a critter he wur, an' no mistake; he us't to go pokin' about, gatherin' weeds an' all sorts o' green garbitch, an' spreadin' 'em out atween sheets o' paper—whet he called button-eyesin'—jest like that ur Dutch doctor as wur rubbed out when we went into the Navagh country, t'other side o' the Gran'."

"I remembers him."

"Wal, this hyur fellar I tell 'ee about, he us't to talk mighty big o' this, that, an' t'other; an' he palavered a heap 'bout a thing thet, ef I don't disremember, wur caled *spuntainyus kumbuxshun*."

"I've heerd o' 't; that are the name."

"Wal, the button-eyeser, he sayed thet a paraira mout take afire o' it-elf, 't out anybody whatsomdiver heving sot it. Now, thet ur's what his chil don't b'lieve, nohow. In coorse, I knows thet lightnin' sometimes may sot a paraira a-bleezin', but lightnin's 'a' nat'ral fire o' itself; an' it's only reezunible to expect thet the dry grass w'd catch from it lik' punk; but I shed like to know how fire w'd kindle 'thout somethin' to kindle it—thet's what I shed like to know."

"I don't believe it can," rejoined Garey.

"Ne'er a bit o' it. I never see'd a burnin' parai a yit, thet thur wa'n't eyther a camp-fire or a Injun at the bottom o' it—thet ur, 'ceptin' whur lightnin' h'd did the bizness."

"And you think, Rube, thar's been Injun at the bottom o' this?"

"Putty nigh sure; an' I'll gi'e you my reezuns. Fust, do 'ee see thur's been no lightnin' this mornin' to 'a' made the fire. Second, it's too fur west hyur for any settlement o' whites—in coorse I speak o' Texans—thur might be Mexikins; them I don't call white, nohow—nosomediver. An' then, ag'in, it kin sea'ce be Mexikins neyt er. It ur too fur no'th for any o' the yellur-bellies o be a-straying jest now, seein' as it's the Mexikin moon wi' the Kimanches, an' both them an' the Leepans ur on the war-trail. Wal, then, it's clur thur's no Mexikin 'bout hyur to hev sot th paraira afire, an' thur's been no lightnin' to do it; thurfor, it must 'a' been did eyther by a Injun, or thet ur dodrotted spuntainyus kumbuxshun."

"One or t'other."

"Wal, being as this child don't b'lieve in the kumbuxshun nohow, thurfore it's my opeen-yun thet red Injuns did the bizness—they did sartint."

"No doubt of it," asserted Garey.

"An' ef they did," continued the old trapper, "thur about yit somewhur not fur off, an' we've got to keep a sharp look-out for our ha'r—thet's what we hev."

"Safe, we have," assented Garey.

"I tell 'ee, Bill," continued Rube, in a new strain, "the Injuns is mighty r'iled jest now. I never know'd 'em so savagerous an' fighty. Th' war hez gi'n 'em a fresh start, an' thur dander's up ag'in' us, by reezun thet the gin'ral didn't take thur offer to help us ag'in' the yellur-bellies. Ef we meet wi' eyther Kimanch' or Leepan on these hyur plains, thu'll scalp us, or we'll scalp 'em—thet'll be it. Wagh!"

"But what for could they 'a' sot the parairy on fire?" inquired Garey.

"Thet 'ere," replied Rube,—"thet 'ere wur what puzzled me at fust. I thort it mout 'a' been done by accydent—preehaps by the scattering o' a camp-fire—for Injuns is careless enuf 'bout thet. Now, howsoever, I've got a different idee. Thet story thet Dutch an' Frenchy hev fetched from the rancherie, gi'es me a insight inter the hull bizness."

I knew the "story" to which Rube had reference. Lige and Le Blanc, when at the village, had heard some rumor of an Indian foray that had just been made against one of the Mexican towns, not far from the rancheria. It had occurred on the same day that we marched out. The Indians—supposed to be Lipans or Comanches—had sacked the place, and carried off both plunder and captives. A party of them had passed near the rancheria after we ourselves had left it. This party had "called" at the hacienda de Vargas and completed the pillage left unfinished by the guerrilla. This was the substance of what the messengers had heard.

"You mean about the Injuns?" said Garey, half interrogatively.

"In coorse," rejoined Rube. "Belike enuf, 'em Injuns ur the same niggars we gi'n sich a rib-roastin' to by the moun'. Wagh! they hain't gone back to thur mountains, as 'twur b'lieved; they dassent 'a' gone back in sich disgrace, 'thout takin' eyther ha'r or hosses. The squaws 'ud 'a' hooted 'em out o' thur wigwams."

"Sure enough."

"Sure, sartint. Wal, Billee, 'ee see now what I mean; thet party's been a-skulketin' 'bout hyur ever since, till they got a fust-rate chance at the Mexikin town, an' thur they've struck a blow."

"It's mighty like as you say, Rube; but why have they sot fire to the parairy?"

"Wagh! Bill, kin ye not see why? It ur plain as Pike's Peak on a summery day."

"I don't see," responded Garey, in a thoughtful tone.

"Well, this child do; an' this ur the reezun; as I tell 'ee, the Injuns hain't forgot the lambaystin' they hed by the moun'; an' preehaps bein' now a weak party, an' thinkin' thet we as wolopped 'em wur still i' the rancherie, they wur afeerd thet on hearing o' thur pilledgin', we mout be arter 'em."

"An' they've burnt the parairy to kiver thur trail?"

"Preezactly so."

"By gosh, you're right, Rube!—it's uncommon like. But whar do you think this trail's goin'? Surely the hoss hain't been caught in the fire?"

I bent forward in the saddle, and listened with acute eagerness. To my great relief, the answer of the old trapper was in the negative.

"He hain't," said he; "ne'er a bit o' it. His trail, do 'ee see, runs in a bee-line, or clost ob a bee-line; now, ef the fire hed 'a' begun afore he wur acrosst this paraira, he w'd long since 'a' doubled 'bout, an' tuk the back track; but 'ee see he hain't did so; thurfor, I conclude he's safe through it, an' the grass must 'a' been sot afire abint 'im."

I breathed freely after listening to these words. A load seemed lifted from my breast—for up to this moment I had been vainly endeavoring to combat the fearful apprehension that had shaped itself in my imagination. From the moment that we had entered the burning prairie, my eyes constantly, and almost mechanically, had sought the ground in front of our course, had wandered over it, with uneasy glance, in dread of beholding forms—lifeless—burned and charred—

The words of the trapper gave relief—almost an assurance that the steed and his rider were still safe—and under the inspiration of renewed hope, I rode forward with lighter heart.

We had advanced about half-a-mile further, when the horse-tracks, hitherto scattered, and tending in different directions, became merged together, as though the Indians had been riding, not in single file—as is their ordinary method—but in an irregular body of several abreast.

The trackers, after proceeding along this new trail for a hundred yards or so, deliberately drew up; and dismounting, bent down upon their hands and knees, as if once more to examine the sign. The rest of us halted a little behind, and watched their proceedings without offering to interrupt them.

Both were observed to be busy blowing aside the ashes, not now from any particular track, but from the full breadth of the trail.

In a few minutes, they succeeded in removing the black dust from a stretch of several yards—so that the numerous hoof prints could be distinctly traced, side by side, or overlapping and half obliterating one another.

Rube now returned to where they had commenced; and then once more leisurely advancing upon his knees, with eyes close to the surface, appeared to scrutinize the print of every hoof separately.

Before he had reached the spot where Garey was still engaged in clearing off the dust, he rose to his feet with an air that told he was satisfied, and turning to his companion, cried out:

"Don't bother furrer, Bill: it ur jest as I thort; they've roped 'im!"

"Sartint they've tuk 'im," asserted Rube, in answer to an interrogatory; "sartint sure; hyur's his track clur as daylight. He's been led hyur at the eend o' a laryette; he's been nigh the middle o' the crowd—some in front—some hev been arter 'im—thet's how they've gone past hyur. Wagh!" continued the speaker, once more turning his eyes upon the trail, "thur's been a good grist on 'em—twenty or more; an' ef this child don't miskalkerklate, thet ain't the hul o' the niggars; it ain't! 'Tur only some o' 'em has galliped out to rope the hoss. I'd lay my rifle ag'in' a Mexican blunderbox, thur's a bigger party than this nigh at hand somewhur hyur. By Geehosopat, thur's boun' to be, sartint as sun-up!"

The suspicion that had half formed itself in my mind was no longer hypothetical; the sign upon the trail had settled that; it was now a positive intelligence—a conviction. The steed had been taken; he and his rider were captive in the hands of the Indians.

This knowledge brought with it a crowd of

new thoughts, in which emotions of the most opposite character mingled together.

The first was a sensation of joy. The steed had been captured, and by human beings. Indians at least were men, and possessed human hearts. Though in the rider they might recognize the lineaments of their pale-faced foes—not so strongly neither—yet a woman, and in such a dilemma, what reason could they have for hostility to her?

None; perhaps the very opposite passion might be excited by the spectacle of her helpless situation. They would see before them the victim of some cruel revenge—the act, too, of their own enemies; this would be more likely to inspire them with sympathy and pity; they would relieve her from her perilous position; would minister to her wants and wounds; would tenderly nurse and cherish her; yes, of all this I felt confident. They were human; how could they do otherwise?

Such was the first rush of my reflections on becoming assured that the steed had been captured by Indians—that Isolina was in their hands. I only thought of her safety—that she was rescued from pain and peril, perhaps from death; and the thought was a gleam of joy.

Alas! only a gleam; and the reflections that followed were painfully bitter.

There was another reason for our rapid advance: all of us were under the extreme agony of thirst—literally gasping for water; and thus physical suffering impelled us to ride forward as fast as our jaded horses could carry us over the ground.

Timber was at length before our eyes—green foliage—looking all the fresher and brighter from contrast with the black plain which it bounded. It was a grove of cottonwoods, skirting a prairie-stream; and beyond this the fire had not extended.

Wild, joyous cries escaped from men and horses, as their eyes rested upon the limpid stream.

The men galloped over the bank, leaped out of their saddles, and without a thought of drowning, plunged breast-deep into the water. Some lifted the crystal liquid in their palms; while others, more impatient, bent down, and ducking their faces in the flood, drank *a la mode du cheval*.

I noticed that the trappers behaved less recklessly than the rest; before going down to drink, the eyes of both were directed, with instinctive caution, along the banks, and into the timber.

Close to where we had halted, I observed a crossing, where numerous tracks of animals formed in the soil a deep, well-beaten path. Rube's eyes were upon it, and I saw that they were glistening with unusual excitement.

"Told 'ee so!" cried he, after a short survey: "yanner's thur trail—war-trail, by the Etur-mal!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WRITING ON THE MAGUEY.

THE skill of the trackers was no longer called in need; the war-trail was as easily followed as a toll-road; a blind man could have guided himself along such a well-trodden highway.

Our rate of speed was now ruled by the capacity of our horses. Alas! their power was nearly at an end. They had been two days and a night under the saddle, with but a few hours to refresh themselves by food or rest: they could not hold out much longer.

One by one they began to lag, until the greater number of them followed with tottering steps hundreds of yards in the rear.

It was in vain to contend against nature. The men were still willing, though they too were wearied to death; but their horses were quite done up—even whip and spur could force them no further. Only my own matchless steed could have continued the journey. Alone I might have advanced, but that would have been madness. What could I have accomplished alone?

Night was fast coming down; it was already twilight. I saw by the clouded sky we should have no moon. We might follow the trail with our waxen torches—not yet burnt out—but that would no longer be safe. For myself, I was reckless enough to have risked life in any way, but the lives of my comrades were not mine. I could not give them—I should not wastefully fling them away.

Reluctantly I glided from my saddle, gave my steed to the grass, and sat down upon the earth.

My followers coming up, said not a word, but picketing their horses, seated themselves around me. One by one they stretched themselves along the sward, and in ten minutes all were asleep.

I alone could not sleep; the fever of unrest was upon me; the demon of thought would not let me close my eyes. Though my orbs ached with the long-protracted vigil, I thought that "not all the drowsy syrups of the world" could have given me repose at that moment. I felt as one who suffers under delirium, produced by the intoxicating cup, the fearful *mania-a-potu*. I could neither sleep nor rest.

I could not even remain seated. I rose to my

feet and wandered around, without heed of where I was going; I strode over the recumbent forms of my sleeping companions; I went among the horses; I paced backward and forward along the banks of the stream.

There was a stream—a small arroyo or rivulet. It was this that had caused me to halt in that particular spot; for wild as were my thoughts, I had enough of reason left to know that we could not encamp without water. The sight of the arroyo had decided my wavering resolution, and upon its banks, almost mechanically, I had drawn bridle and dismounted.

I once more descended to the bend of the stream, and, raising the water in the palms of my hands, repeatedly applied it to my lips and temples. The cool liquid refreshed me, and seemed to soothe both my nerves and my spirits.

After a time, both felt calmer, and I sat down upon the bank, and watched for a while the clear rivulet rippling past over its bed of yellow sand and glistening pebbles of quartz. The water was perfectly diaphanous; and, though the sun was no longer shining, I could see tiny silver fish, of the genus *hyodon*, sporting themselves in the lowest depths of the pool. How I envied them their innocent gambols, their life of crystal purity and freedom! Here, in this remote prairie stream, dwelt not the alligator, nor the ravenous garfish; here came no dolphin or shark to chase them no tyrant of the waters to put them in fear. To be envied, indeed, such an insouciant happy existence.

I watched them for a long while, till I thought that my eyes were growing heavy, and, after all, I might sleep. The murmur of the arroyo helped to increase this inclination to repose, and, perhaps, I might have slept; but at that moment, chancing to look around, my eyes rested upon an object that again drove sleep far away, and I was soon as wakeful as ever.

Close to where I seated myself grew a large plant of the Mexican aloe (*agave Americana*). It was the wild maguay, of course, but of a species with broad fleshy leaves of dark-green color, somewhat resembling the maguay of cultivation. I noticed that one of the great blades of the plant was bruised down, and the spine, which had terminated it, torn off.

All this would not have drawn my attention; I was already aware that the Indians had made a halt where we were encamped, and their sign was plenteous around—in the tracks of their animals, and the broken branches of trees. One of their horses or mules might have munched at the maguay in passing; and, viewing the bruised blade from a distance, I should have hazarded just such a conjecture. But my eyes were close to the plant, and, to my astonishment, I observed that there was writing upon the leaf!

I turned over upon my knees, and seizing the huge blade, bent it down before me, so as to obtain a better view of its surface. I read:

"Captured by Comanches—a war-party with many captives—women and children—*ay de mí!* pobres niñas! northwest from this place. Saved from death; alas! I fear—"

The writing ended abruptly. There was no signature, but it needed not that. I had no doubts about who was the writer; in fact, rude as was the chirography—from the material used—I easily identified the hand. It was Isolina de Vargas who had written.

I saw that she had torn off the terminal spine, and using it as a stylus, had graven those characters upon the epidermis of the plant.

Sweet, subtle spirit! under any guise I could have recognized its outpourings.

"Saved from death!"—thank Heaven for that!—"alas! I fear." Oh, what feared she! Was it worse than death? that terrible fate—too terrible to think of!

She had broken off, without finishing the sentence. Why had she done so? The sheet was broad—would have held many more words—why had she not written more? Did she dread to tell the cause of her fear? or had she been interrupted by the approach of some of her tyrant captors? Oh, merciful Heaven! save me from thought!

I re-read the words over and over; there was nothing more. I examined the other leaves of the plant—on both sides, concave and convex. I examined them—not a word more could I find. What I had read was all she had written.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A RED EPISTLE.

THE trail led northwest, as written upon the maguay. No doubt Isolina had heard her captors forespeak their plans. I knew that she herself understood something of the Comanche language. The accomplishment may appear strange—and not strange, either, when it is known that her mother could have spoken it well: with her it was a native tongue.

But even without this knowledge she might still have learned the designs of the savages—for these southern Comanches are accomplished linguists; many of them can speak the beautiful language of Andalusia! There was a time when a portion of the tribe submitted to the teaching of the mission padres; besides, a few among

them might boast—which they do not—of Iberian blood.

No doubt, then, that the captive in their midst had overheard them discussing their projects.

We had ridden about two hours when we came upon the ground where the Indians had made their night-camp. We approached it warily and with stealth, for we were now traveling with great caution. We had need. Should a single savage, straggling behind, set eyes upon us, we might as well be seen by the whole band. If discovered upon the war-trail, our lives would not be worth much. Some of us might escape; but even if all of us survived, our plan would be completely frustrated.

I say plan, for I had formed one. During the long vigil of the night my thoughts had not been idle, and a course of action I had traced out, though it was not yet fully developed in my mind. Circumstances might yet alter it, or aid me in its execution.

We approached their night encampment, then, warily and with stealth. The smoke of its smoldering fires pointed out the place, and warned us from afar.

We found it quite deserted—the gaunt wolf and coyote alone occupying the ground, disputing with each other possession of the hide and bones of a horse—the debris of the Indian breakfast.

Had we not known already, the trappers could have told by the sign of the camp to what tribe the Indians belonged. There were still standing the poles of a tent—only one—doubtless the lodge of the head chief. The poles were temporary ones—saplings cut from the adjacent thicket. They were placed in a circle, and meeting at the top, were tied together with a piece of thong—so that, when covered, the lodge would have exhibited the form of a perfect cone. This we knew was the fashion of the Comanche tent.

"Ef 't had 'a' been Kickapoo," said Rube, who took the opportunity of displaying his knowledge, "thud 'a' bent thur poles in'ard, so's to make a sort o' roun' top, de'e see; an' ef 't had 'a' been Wacoos or Witcheatoes, thud 'a' left a hole at the top to let out thur smoke. Delawurs an' Shawnees w'd 'a' hed tents, jest like whites; but thet ur ain't thur way o' makin' a fire. In Shawnee fire, the logs 'u'd 'a' been laid wi' one eend turned in an' the t'other turned out, jest like the star on a Texas flag, or the spokes o' a wagon wheel. Likeways, Cherokees an' Choctaw w'd 'a' hed reg'lar tents, but thur fire w'd 'a' been alser diff'rint. They'd 'a' sot the logs parallel, side by side, an' lit 'em only at one eend, an' then pushed 'em up as fast as they burn'd. Thet's thur way. 'Ee see these hyur logs is sot diff'rint. Thur lit in the middle, and thet's Kiamanch' for sartin, it ur."

Rube's "clairvoyance" extended further. The savages had been astart as early as ourselves. They had decamped about daylight, and were now exactly two hours ahead of us on the trail.

Why were they traveling so rapidly? Not from fear of pursuit by any enemy. The soldiers of Mexico—had these been regarded by them—were too busy with the Saxon foe, and *vice versa*. They could hardly be expecting us upon an expedition to rob them of their captives. Perhaps they were driving forward to be in time for the great herds of buffalo that, along with the cold northerners, might now be looked for in the higher latitudes of the Comanche range. This was the explanation given by the trappers—most probably the true one.

Under the influence of singular emotions, I rode over the ground. There were other signs besides those of the savage—signs of the plunder with which they were laden—signs of civilization. There were fragments of broken cups and musical instruments, torn leaves of books, remnants of dresses, silks and velvets, a small satin slipper (the peculiar *chaussure* of the Mexican manola) side by side with a worn-out, mud-stained moccasin—fit emblems of savage and civilized life.

There was no time for speculating on so curious a confusion. I was looking for signs of her—for traces of my betrothed.

I cast around me inquiring glances. Where was it probable she had passed the night? Where?

Involuntarily my eyes rested upon the naked poles—the tent of the chief. How could it be otherwise? Who among all the captives like her? grandly beautiful to satisfy the eye even of a savage chieftain—grandly, magnificently beautiful, how could she escape his notice? There, in his lodge, shrouded under the brown skins of buffaloes—under hideous devices—in the arms of a painted, keel-bedaubed savage—his arms brawn and greasy—embraced—oh!

"Young fellur! I ain't much o' a skollur, but I'd stake a pack o' beaver plew ag'in' a plug o' Jeemes River thet this hyur manurscript wur entended for y'ursel, an' nob'dy else. Thur's writin' upon it, thet's clur, an' mighty kew'rur ink I reck'n thet ur. Oncest ov a time I k'd 'a' read write, or print eythur, as easy as fallin' off a log; for thur wur a Yankee fellur on Duck Crik thet kep' a putty consid'able school thur, an' the ole 'oman—thet ur Mrs. Rawlings hed this child put thro' a reg'lar coorse o' Testymint. I remembers readin' 'bout thet ur cussed nigger

as toted the possible sack—Judeas, ef I recollect right, wur the durned raskul's name. Ef I kud 'a' laid claws on him, I'd 'a' raised his ha'r in the shakin' o' a goat's tail. Wagh! thet I w'd."

Rube's indignation against the betrayer having reached its climax, brought his speech to a termination.

I had not waited for its finale. The object which he held between his fingers had more interest for me than either the history of his own early days or the story of the betrayal.

It was a paper—a note actually folded, and addressed "Warfield!" He had found it upon the grass, close to where the tent had stood, where it was held in the crotch of a split reed, the other end of which was sticking in the ground.

No wonder the trapper had remarked upon the ink; there was no mistaking the character of that livid red: the writing was in blood!

Hastily unfolding the paper, I read:

"Henri! I am still safe, but in dread of a sad fate—the fate of the poor white captive among these hideous men. Last night I feared it, but the Virgin shielded me. It has not come. Oh! I shall not submit—I shall die by my own hand. A strange chance has hitherto saved me from this horrid outrage. No! it was not chance, but Heaven that interposed. It is thus: Two of my captors claim me—one, the son of the chief—the other, the wretch to whom you granted life and freedom. Would to God it had been otherwise! Of the two, he of white blood is the viler savage—bad, brutal—a very demon. Both took part in the capture of the steed, therefore both claim me as their 'property.' The claim is not yet adjusted; hence have I been spared. But, alas! I fear my hour is nigh. A council is to be held that will decide to which of these monsters I am to be given. If to either, it is a horrid fate; if to neither, a doom still more horrible. Perchance, you know their custom: I should be common property—the victim of all. *Dios de mí alma!* Never—never! Death—welcome death!"

"Fear not, Henri, lord of my heart! fear not that I shall dishonor your love. No—sacred in my breast, its purity shall be preserved, even at the sacrifice of my life. I shall bathe it with my blood. Ah me! my heart is bleeding now! They come to drag me away. Farewell! farewell!"

Such were the contents of the page—the fly-leaf of a torn missal. Upon the other side was a vignette—a picture of Dolores, the weeping saint of Mexico! Had it been chosen, the emblem could scarcely have been more appropriate.

I thrust the red writing into my bosom; and, without waiting to exchange a word with my companions, pressed forward upon the trail.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MORE WRITING IN RED.

THE men followed as before. We needed no trackers to point out the way; the path was plain as a drover's road—a thousand hoofs had made their mark upon the ground.

We rode at a regular pace, not rapidly. I was in no hurry to come up with the savages; I desired to get sight of them just after nightfall, not before, lest they might also get sight of us.

The plan I proposed to myself for the rescue of my betrothed, could not be accomplished in the daytime; darkness alone could avail me in carrying it out, and for nightfall must I wait.

We could easily have overtaken the Indians before night. They were but two short hours in the advance of us, and would be certain—as is their custom on the war-trail—to make a noon-halt of several hours' duration. Even Indian horses require to be rested.

We calculated the rate at which they were traveling—how many miles to the hour. The prairie-men could tell to a furlong, both the gait and the distance.

The tracks of the poor captives were still seen along the trail. This showed that the party could not have been going faster than a walk.

The prairie-men alleged there were many horses without riders—led or driven; many mules, too—the product of the foray. Why were the poor captives not permitted to ride them?

Was it sheer cruelty, or brutal indifference on the part of their captors? Did the inhuman monsters gloat over the sufferings of these unfortunates, and deny them even the alleviation of physical pain? The affirmative answer to all these questions was probably the true one, since hardly better—no better, indeed—is the behavior of these savages toward the women of their own blood and kind—their own squaws.

Talk not to me of the noble savage—of the simplicity and gentleness of that condition falsely termed a "state of nature." It is not nature. God meant not man to be a wild Ishmaelite on the face of the earth. Man was made for civilization—for society; and only under its influence does he assume the form and grace of true nobility. Leave him to himself—to the play of his instincts—to the indulgence of his evil impulses—and man becomes a brute, a beast of prey. Even worse—for wolf and tiger gently consort with their kind, and still more gently with their family; they feel the tenderness of the family tie. Where is the savage upon all the earth who does not usurp dominion, and practice the meanest tyranny, over his weaker mate? Where can you find him? Not on the blood-stained karroos of

Africa, not upon the forest-plains of the Amazon, not by the icy shores of the Arctic Sea, certainly not upon the prairies of North America.

No man can be noble who would in wrath lay his finger upon weaker woman; talk not, then, of the noble savage!—fancy of poets, myth of romancers!

The tracks of riderless horses, the footsteps of walking women—tender girls and children—upon that long tiresome trail, had for me a cruel significance—those slender tiny tracks of pretty feet—*pobres ninas!*

There was one that fixed my attention more than the rest; every now and then my eyes were upon it: I fancied I could identify it. It was exactly the size, I thought. The perfect symmetry and configuration, the oval curve of the heel, the high instep, the row of small graduated globes made by the impression of the toes, the smooth surface left by the imprint of the delicate epidermis—all these points seemed to characterize the footprint of a lady.

Surely it could not be hers? Oh, surely she would not be toiling along that weary track? Cruel as were the hearts of her captors, brutal as were their natures, surely they would not inflict this unnecessary pain? Beauty like hers should command kinder treatment, should inspire compassion even in the breast of a savage. Alas! I deemed it doubtful.

We rode slowly on, as already said, not desirous of yet overtaking the foe; we were allowing them time to depart from their noon halting-place. We might have stopped there a while longer, but I could not submit to the repose of a halt. Motion, however slow, appeared progress, and in some measure hindered me from dwelling upon thoughts that only produced unnecessary pain.

Notwithstanding the incumbrance of their spoils, the Indians must have been traveling faster than we. They had no fear of foes to retard them; naught to require either spies or caution. They were now in their own country—in the very heart of the Comanche range—and in dread of no enemy. They were moving freely and without fear. We, on the contrary, had to keep our scouts in the advance; every bend of the road had to be reconnoitered by them, every bush examined, every rise of the ground approached with extreme care and watchfulness. These manœuvres occupied time, and we moved slowly enough.

It was after mid-day when we arrived at the noon-camp of the savages. The smoke, as before, warned us, and approaching under cover, we perceived that they were gone. They had kindled fires and cooked flesh. The bones, clean picked, were easily identified, and the mid-day meal showed that there had been no change in the diet of these hippophagists; dinner and dejeuner had been alike—drawn from the same larder.

Again I searched the ground; but, as before, the eyes of the trapper proved better than mine.

"Hyr's a other billy-dux, young fellur," said he, handing me the paper.

Another leaf from the missal!

I seized it eagerly—eagerly I devoured its contents! This time they were more brief:

"Once more I open my veins. The council meets to-night. In a few hours it will be decided whose property I am—whose slave—whose—*Santissima Maria!* I cannot write the word. I shall attempt to escape. They leave my hands free, but my limbs are tightly bound. I have tried to undo my fastenings, but cannot. Oh, if I but had a knife! I know where one is kept; I may contrive to seize it, but it must be in the last moment—it will not do to fail. Henri, I am firm and resolute; I do not yield to despair. One way or the other, I shall free myself from the hideous embrace of— They come—the villain watches me—I must—"

The writing ended abruptly. Her jailers had suddenly approached.

The paper had evidently been concealed from them in haste; it had been crumpled up and flung upon the grass—for so was it when found.

We remained for a while upon the spot, to rest and refresh our horses; the poor brutes needed both. There was water at the place, and that might not be met with again.

The sun was far down when we resumed our march—our last march upon the war-trail.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN "INJUN ON THE BACK-TRACK."

WE had advanced about a mile further, when our scouts—who, as usual, had gone forward to reconnoiter—having ascended a swell of the prairie, were observed crouching behind some bushes that grew upon its crest.

We all drew bridle to await the result of their reconnoissance. The peculiar attitude in which they had placed themselves, and the apparent earnestness with which they glanced over the bushes, led us to believe that some object was before their eyes of more than common interest.

So it proved. We had scarcely halted, when they were seen to retire suddenly from the cover, and rising erect, run at full speed back

down the hill—at the same time making signals to us to conceal ourselves in the timber.

Fortunately, there was timber near; and in a few seconds we had all ridden into it, taking the horses of the trappers along with us.

The declivity of the hill enabled the scouts to run with swiftness; and they were among the trees almost as soon as we.

"What is it?" inquired several in the same breath.

"Injun on the back-track," replied the panting trappers.

"Indians!—how many of them?" naturally asked one of the rangers.

"Who sayed Injuns? We sayed a Injun," sharply retorted Rube. "Durn y'ur palaver! thur's no time for jaw-waggin'. Git y'ur rope ready, Bill. 'Ee durned greenhorns! keep down y'ur guns; shootin' won't do hyur—y'u'd hev the bul gang back in the flappin' o' a beaver's tail. You, Bill, rope the red-skin, an' let the young fellur help—he knows how; an' ef both shed miss'im, I ain't a-gwine. 'Ee hear me, fellurs? Don't ne'er a one o' ye fire; ef a gun ur wanted, Targuts'll be sufficient, I guess. For y'ur lives don't 'ee fire them ur blunderboxes o' yours till 'ee see me miss—they'd be heer'd ten mile off. Ready wi' y'ur rope, Billee! You, young fellur! All right; mind y'ur eyes both an' snare the durned nigger like a swamp-rabbit. Yanner he comes, right inter the trap, by the jumpin' Geehosophat!"

The pithy chapter of instructions above detailed was delivered in far less time than it takes to read it. The speaker never paused till he had uttered the final emphatic expression, which was one of his favorite phrases of embellishment.

At the same instant I saw, just appearing above the crest of the ridge, the head and shoulders of a savage. In a few seconds more, the body rose in sight; and then the thighs and legs, with a large piebald mustang between them. I need scarcely add that the horse was going at a gallop; it is a rare sight when a horse Indian rides any other gait.

There was only one. The scouts were sure of this. Beyond the swell stretched an open prairie, and if the Indian had had companions or followers, they would have been seen. He was alone.

What had brought him back on the trail? Was he upon the scout?

No; he was riding without thought, and without precaution. A scout would have acted otherwise.

He might have been a messenger; but whither bound? Surely the Indians had left no party in our rear?

Quickly these inquiries passed among us, and quick conjectures were offered in answer. The voyager gave the most probable solution.

"Pe gar! he go back for ze sheel."

"Shield! what shield?"

"Ah, you no see'im. I see'im wiz me eye; he vas cache dans les herbes—von large sheel—bouclier tree gros—fabrique from ze peau of de buffle—ze parfaite—et garnie avec les scalp—frais et sanglants—scalps Mexicaines. Mon Dieu!"

The explanation was understood. Le Blanc had observed a shield among the bushes where we had halted—like enough left behind by some of the traves. It was garnished with scalp, fresh Mexican scalp—like enough. The Indian had forgotten both his armor and his trophies; he was on his way to recover them—like enough.

There was no time either for further talk or conjecture; the red horseman had reached the bottom of the hill; in ten seconds more, he would be lazoed or shot!

Garey and I placed ourselves on opposite sides of the path, both with our lazoes coiled and ready. The trapper was an adept in the use of this singular weapon, and I too understood something of its management. The trees were in our way; and would have prevented the proper winding of it; but it was our intention to spur clear of the timber—the moment the Indian came within range—and "rope" him on the run.

Rube crouched behind Garey, rifle in hand, and the rangers were also ready, in case both the lazoes and Rube's rifle should miss.

It would not do to let the Indian either go on or go back; in either case he would report us. Should he pass the spot where we were, he would observe our tracks in a minute's time—even amidst the thousands of others—and would be certain to return by another route. Should he escape from us, and gallop away, still worse. He must not be permitted either to go on or go back; he must be captured or killed!

For my part, I desired that the former should be his destiny. I had no feeling of revenge to gratify by taking the life of this red-man; and had his capture not been absolutely necessary to our own safety, I should willingly have let him come and go as he listed.

Some of my comrades were actuated by very different motives. Killing a Comanche Indian was, by their creed, no greater crime than killing a wolf, a panther, or a grizzly bear; and it was not from any motives of mercy that the trapper had cautioned the others to hold their

fire; prudence alone dictated the advice—he had given his reason—the reports of our guns might be heard.

Through the leaves I looked upon the horseman as he advanced. A fine-looking fellow he was—no doubt one of the distinguished warriors of his tribe. What his face was I could not see, for the war-paint disfigured it with a hideous mask; but his body was large, his chest broad and full, his limbs symmetrical, and well turned to the very toes. He sat his horse like a centaur.

I had no opportunity for prolonged observation. Without hesitating, the Indian galloped up.

I sprung my horse clear of the timber. I wound the lazo around my head, and hurled it toward him; I saw the noose settling over his shoulders, and falling down to his hips.

I spurred in the opposite direction; I felt the quick jerk, and the taut rope told me I had secured the victim.

I turned in my saddle, and glanced back; I saw the rope of Garey around the neck of the Indian's mustang, tightened, and holding him fast. Horse and horseman—both were ours.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MY PLAN.

THE savage did not yield himself up without resistance. Resistance with an Indian is instinctive, as with a wild animal. He flung himself from his horse, and drawing his knife, with a single cut severed the thong that bound him.

In another instant he would have been off among the bushes; but before he could move from the spot, half-a-dozen strong arms were around him; and in spite of his struggles, and the dangerous thrusts of his long Spanish knife, he was "choked" down and held fast.

My followers were for making short work with him. More than one had bared their blades to finish him upon the spot, and would have done so, had I not interfered. I was averse to spilling his blood; and by my intercession, his life was spared.

To prevent him from giving us further trouble, however, we tied him to a tree in such a manner that he could not possibly free himself.

The mode of securing him was suggested by Stanfield, the backwoodsman: it was simple and safe. A tree was chosen whose trunk was large enough to fill the embrace of the Indian, so that the ends of his fingers just met when his arms were drawn to their full stretch around it. Upon his wrists thongs of raw hide were firmly looped, and then knotted together. His ankles were also bound by similar cords—the ends of which were staked, so as to hinder him from worming around the tree, and perchance wearing off his thongs, or chafing them, so that they might break.

The ligature was perfect; the most expert jail-breaker could not have freed himself from such a fastening.

It was our intention to leave him thus, and perhaps set him free upon our return, if we should return by that way—a doubtful hypothesis.

I thought not at the time of the cruelty we were committing. We had spared the Indian's life—a mercy at the moment—and I was too much concerned about the future of others to waste reflection on his.

We had taken the precaution to leave him at some distance from the place of his capture: others of his party might come after, and discover him, soon enough to interfere with our plans. His prison had been chosen far off in the depth of the woods; even his shouts could not have been heard by any one passing along the trail.

He was not to be left entirely alone; a horse was to be his companion—not his own—for one of the rangers had fancied an exchange. Stanfield—not well mounted—had proposed a "swap" as he jocosely termed it, to which the savage had no alternative but consent; and the Kentuckian, having "bitched" his worn-out nag to a tree, led off the skewbald mustang in triumph, declaring that he was now "suar" wi' the Indyens. Stanfield would have liked it better had the "swap" been made with the renegade who had robbed him.

We were about to leave the place and move on, when a bright idea suddenly came into my head:

The plan I had proposed to myself was simple enough; it would require more of courage than stratagem; but to the former I was sufficiently nerved by the desperate circumstances in which we had become involved. I proposed to enter the Indian camp in the night—of course, by stealth and under cover of the darkness—to find the captive, if possible—set her limbs free—and then trust to chance for the escape of both of us.

If once inside the encampment, and within reach of her, a sudden coup might accomplish all this; success was not beyond possibility nor probability either; and the circumstances admitted no plan that promised so fairly.

To have attempted fight with my few followers against such a host—to have attacked the Indian camp, even under the advantage of an alarm—would have been sheer madness. It

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must have resulted not only in our immediate defeat, but would have destroyed our last chance of rescuing the captive. The savages, once alarmed and warned, could never be approached again. Isolana would be lost forever.

My followers agreed with me upon the imprudence of an attack. Folly they termed it—and not from any motives of fear; they were willing to risk all; and had I so ordered, would have charged with me, rifle in hand, into the very midst of the enemy's lines. I knew they would, every man of them. Even the voyageur—the least brave of the party—would not have flinched; for, in the midst of brave men, cowards cease to be.

But such a course would indeed have been folly—madness. We thought not of adopting it; all approved of the plan I had formed, and which I had already laid before them as we tarried by the noon halting-place.

Several had volunteered to be my companions—to venture along with me into the camp of the savage; to share with me the extreme of the danger; but for several reasons I was determined to go alone. Should even one of them be along with me, I saw it would double the risk of detection. In this matter, stratagem, not strength, was needed, and speed in the last moments would be worth both.

Of course, I did not think to get the captive clear without being observed and pursued—such an expectation would have been preposterous; she would be too well watched by the savages—not only by her jailers, but by the jealous eyes of those rival claimants of her body.

No; on the contrary, I anticipated pursuit—close and eager. It might be strife; but I trusted to my own swiftness of foot, and to hers—for well knew I her bold heart and free limb; it was no helpless burden I should have to bring away.

I trusted to my being able to baffle their pursuit—to keep them back while she ran forward. For that purpose I should take with me my knife and revolvers. I trusted to these, and much to chance, or perhaps I should rather say to God. My cause was good—my heart firm and hopeful.

Other precautions I intended to take: horses ready as near as they might be brought; men also ready in their saddles, rifle in hand—ready for fight, or flight.

Such was the enterprise upon which I was resolved. Success or death was staked upon the issue. If not successful, I cared not to survive it.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"PAINTING INJUN."

WITHAL, I was not reckless. If not sanguine, I was far from despondent; and as I continued to dwell upon it, the prospect seemed to brighten and success to appear less problematical.

One of the chief difficulties I should have to encounter would be getting into the camp. Once inside the lines—that is, among the camp-fires and tents, if there should be any—I should be comparatively safe. This I knew from experience; for it would not be my first visit to an encampment of prairie Indians. Even in their midst, mingling with the savages themselves, and under the light of their glaring fires, I should be less exposed to the danger of detection than while attempting to cross their lines. First, I should have to pass the outlying pickets; then within these the horse-guards; and within these again the horses themselves.

You may smile when I assert that the last was to me a source of apprehension as great as either of the others. An Indian horse is a sentinel not to be despised. He is as much the enemy of the white man as his master; and partly from fear, and partly from actual antipathy, he will not permit the former to approach him. The human watcher may be negligent—may sleep upon his post—the horse never. The scent of a white man, or the sight of a skulking form, will cause him to snort and neigh, so that a whole camp will either be impeded or put upon the alert in a few minutes. Many a well-planned attack has been defeated by the warning snort of the sentinel mustang.

It is not that the prairie horse feels any peculiar attachment for the Indian. Strange if he did, since tyrant more cruel to the equine race does not exist. No driver more severe, no rider more hard, than a horse Indian.

It is simply the faithfulness which the noble animal exhibits for his companion and master, with the instinct which tells him when that master is menaced by danger. He will do the same service for a white as for a red-man; and often does the weary trapper take his lone rest with full confidence that the vigil will be faithfully kept by his horse.

Had there been dogs in the Indian camp my apprehensions would have been still more acute—the danger would have been more than doubled. Within the lines these cunning brutes would have known me as an enemy: the disguise of garments would not have availed me; by the scent, an Indian dog can at once tell the white from the red-man; and they appear to hold a real antipathy against the race of the Celt or Saxon. Even in the time of truce a

white man entering an Indian camp can scarcely be protected from the wolfish pack.

I knew there were no dogs—we saw tracks of none. The Indians had been upon the war-trail; and when they proceed on these grand expeditions, their dogs, like their women, are left "at home." I had reason to be thankful that such was their custom.

Of course it was my intention to go disguised; it would have been madness to have gone otherwise. In the darkest night, my uniform would have betrayed me; but necessarily, in my search for the captive, I should be led within the light of the fires.

It was my design, therefore, to counterfeit the Indian costume, and how to do this had been for some time the subject of my reflections. I had been congratulating myself on the possession of the buffalo-robe. That would go far toward the disguise; but other articles were wanting to complete my costume. The leggings and moccasins—the plumed head-dress and neck ornaments—the long elfin locks—the bronze complexion of arms and breast—the piebald face of chalk, charcoal, and vermilion—where were all these to be obtained? There was no *costumerie* in the desert.

In the moment of excitement that succeeded the capture of the savage, I had been thinking of other things. It was only when we were about to part from him that the idea jumped into my mind—that bright idea—that he could furnish me—the very man.

I turned back to reconnoiter his person. Dismounting, I scanned him from head to foot. With delight my eyes rested upon his buckskin-leggings, his bead-embroidered moccasins, his pendent collar of javali-tusks, his eagle-plumes stained red, and the ample robe of jaguar-skins that draped his back—all pleased me much.

But that we were bent on an errand of peril, the last-mentioned article would not have been left there. My followers had eyed it with avidity, and more than one of them had been desirous of removing it; but the prospect of proximate peril had damped the ardor for spoil; and the splendid robe had been permitted to remain, where so gracefully it hung, upon the shoulders of the savage.

It soon replaced the buffalo-robe upon mine; my boots were cast aside, and my legs incased in the scalp-fringed leggings; my hips were swathed in the leathern "breech-clout;" and my feet thrust into the foot-gear of the Comanche, which, by good fortune, fitted to a hair.

There was yet much required to make me an Indian. Comanches upon the war-trail go naked from the waist upward—the tunic-shirt is only worn by them, when hunting, or on ordinary occasions. How was I to counterfeit the copper skin—the bronzed arms and shoulders?—the mottled breast—the face of red, and white, and black? Paint only could aid me; and where was paint to be procured? The black we could imitate with gunpowder, but—

"Waghi!" ejaculated Rube, who was seen holding in his hands a wolf-skin, prettily trimmed and garnished with quills and beads—the medicine-bag of the Indian. "Waghi! I thort we'd find the materials in the niggur's possible-sack—hyur they be!"

Rube had dived his hand to the bottom of the embroidered bag; and, while speaking, drew it triumphantly forth. Several little leathern packets appeared between his fingers, which, from their stained outsides, evidently contained pigments of various colors; while a small shining object in their midst proved, on closer inspection, to be a looking-glass!

Neither the trappers nor myself were astonished at finding these odd "notions" in such a place; on the contrary, it was natural we should have looked for them there. Seldom in peace, but never in time of war, does the Indian ride abroad without his rouge and his mirror!

The colors were of the right sort, and corresponded exactly with those that glittered upon the skin of the captive warrior.

Under the keen edge of a bowie, my mustaches came off in a twinkling; a little grease was procured; the paints were mixed; and placing myself side by side with the Indian, I stood for his portrait. Rube was the painter—a piece of soft buckskin his brush—the broad palm of Garey his palette.

The operation did not last a great while. In twenty minutes it was all over; and the Indian brave and I appeared the exact counterparts of each other. Streak by streak, and spot by spot, had the old trapper imitated those hideous hieroglyphics—even to the red hand upon the breast, and the cross upon the brow. In horrid aspect, the copy quite equaled the original.

One thing was still lacking—an important element in the metamorphosis of disguise; I wanted the long snaky black tresses that adorned the head of the Comanche.

The want was soon supplied. Again the bowie blade was called upon to serve as scissors; and with Garey to perform the tonsorial feat, the *chevelure* of the Indian was shorn of its flowing glories.

The savage winced as the keen blade glistened

around his brow; he had no other thought than that he was about to be scalped alive!

"Tain't the way I'd raise his ha'r, the dod-rotted skunk!" muttered Rube, as he stood watching the operation. "Fotch the hide along wi' it, Bill! It'll save bother—'ee'll hev to make a wig ef 'ee don't; skin 'im, durn 'im!"

Of course Garey did not give heed to this cruel counsel, which he knew was not meant for earnest.

A rude "scratch" was soon constructed, and being placed upon my head, was attached to my own waving locks. Fortunately, these were of dark color, and the hue corresponded.

I fancied I saw the Indian smile when he perceived the use we were making of his splendid tresses. It was a grim smile, however; and from the first moment to the last, neither word nor ejaculation escaped from his lips.

Even I was forced to smile; I could not restrain myself. The odd travesty in which we were engaged—the strange commingling of the comic and serious in the act—and above all, the ludicrous look of the captive Indian, after they had close cropped him—was enough to make a stone smile. My comrades could not contain themselves, but laughed outright.

The plume-bonnet was now placed on my head. It was fortunate the brave had one—for this magnificent head-dress is rarely worn on a war-expedition; fortunate, for it aided materially in completing the counterfeit. With it upon my head, the false hair could hardly have been detected under the light of day.

There was no more to be done. The painter, hair-dresser and costumer, had performed their several offices—I was ready for the masquerade.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LAST HOURS ON THE TRAIL.

MORE cautiously than ever we now crept along the trail—advancing only after the ground had been thoroughly "quartered" by the scouts. Time was of the least consequence. The fresh sign of the Indians told us they were but a short way ahead of us; we believed we could have ridden within sight of them at any moment.

We did not wish to set eyes on them before sunset. It could be no advantage to us to overtake them on the march, but the contrary. Some lagging Indian might be found in the rear of the band; we might come in contact with him, and thus defeat all our designs.

We hung back, therefore—allowing sufficient time for the savages to pitch their camp, and for their stragglers to get into it.

On the other hand I did not desire to arrive late. The council was to be held that night—so she had learned—and after the council would come the crisis. I must be in time for both.

At what hour would the council take place?

It might be just after they had halted. The son of a chief, and a chief himself—for the white renegade was a leader of red-men—a question between two such men would not remain long undecided. And a question of so much importance—involving such consequence—property in body and soul—possession of the most beautiful woman in the world!

Oh! I wondered! Could these hideous, ocher-stained, grease-bedaubed brutes appreciate that peerless beauty? Impossible, I thought. The delicate lines of her loveliness would be lost upon their gross eyes and coarse, sensual hearts. That pearl beyond price—paste would have satisfied them as well—they could not distinguish the diamond from common glass.

And yet the Comanche is not without lovecraft. Coarse as might be the passion, no doubt they loved her—both loved her—red savage and white savage.

For this very reason the "trial" would not be delayed; the question would be speedily decided—in order that the quarrel of the chiefs might be brought to an end. For this very reason the crisis might be hastened, the council take place at an early hour; for this very reason, I too must needs be early upon the spot.

It was my aim to arrive within sight of the Indian encampment just before night—in the twilight, if possible—that we might be able to make reconnaissance of the ground before darkness should cover it from our view. We were desirous of acquainting ourselves with the lay of the surrounding country as well—so that, in the event of our escape, we should know which was the best direction to take.

We timed our advance by the sign upon the trail. The keen scouts could tell, almost to a minute, when the latest tracks were made; and by this we were guided. Both glided silently along, their eyes constantly and earnestly turned upon the ground.

Mine were more anxiously bent upon the sky; from that quarter I most feared an obstacle to the execution of my purpose. What a change had come over my desires!—how different were they from those of the two preceding nights! The very same aspect of the heavens that had hitherto chagrined and baffled me, would now have been welcome. In my heart, I had lately execrated the clouds; in that same heart, I was now praying for cloud, and storm, and darkness!

Now could I have blessed the clouds, but there

were none to bless—not a speck appeared over the whole face of the firmament—the eye beheld only the illimitable ether.

In another hour that boundless blue would be studded with millions of bright stars; and, silvered by the light of a resplendent moon, the night would be as day.

I was dismayed at the prospect. I prayed for cloud, and storm, and darkness. Human heart! when blinded by its own petty passions, unreasoning and unreasonable; my petition was opposed to the unalterable laws of nature—it could not be heard.

I can scarcely describe how the aspect of that bright sky troubled and pained me. The night-bird, which joys only in deepest darkness, could not have liked it less. Should there be moonlight the enterprise would be made more perilous—doubly more. Should there be moonlight—why need I form an hypothesis? Moonlight there would be to a certainty. It was the middle of the lunar month, and the moon would be up almost as the sun went down—full, round, and almost as bright as he—with no cloud to cover her face, to shroud the earth from her white light. Certainly there would be moonlight!

Well thought of was that disguise—well spent our labor in making it so perfect. Under the moonlight, to it only could I trust; by it only might I expect to preserve my incognito.

But the eye of the Indian savage is sharp, and his perception keen—almost as instinct itself. I could not rely much upon my borrowed plumes, should speech be required from me. Just on account of the cunning imitation, the perfectness of the pattern, some friends of the original might have business with me—might approach and address me. I knew but a few words of Comanche—how should I escape from the colloquy?

Such thoughts were troubling me as we rode onward.

Night was near; the sun's lower limb rested on the far horizon of the west; the hour was an anxious one to me.

The scouts had been for some time in the advance, without returning to report; and we had halted in a cove to wait for them. A high hill was before us, wooded only at the summit; over this hill the war-trail led. We had observed the scouts go into the timber. We kept our eyes upon the spot, waiting for their return.

Presently one of them appeared just outside the edge of the wood—Garey, we saw it was. He made signs to us to come on.

We rode up the hill, and entered among the trees. After going a little further, we diverged from the trail. The scout guided us through the trunks over the high summit. On the other side, the wood extended only a little below; but we did not ride beyond it; we halted before coming to its edge, and dismounting, tied our horses to the trees.

We crept forward on our hands and knees till we had reached the utmost verge of the timber; through the leaves we peered, looking down into the plain beyond. We saw smokes and fires, and a skin-lodge in their midst; we saw dark forms around—men moving over the ground, and horses with their heads to the grass; we were looking upon the camp of the Comanches.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE COMANCHE CAMP.

We had reached our ground just at the moment I desired. It was twilight—dark enough to render ourselves inconspicuous under the additional shadow of the trees—yet sufficiently clear to allow a full reconnaissance of the enemy's position. Our point of view was a good one—under a single *coup-d'œil* commanding the encampment, and a vast extent of country around it. The hill we had climbed—a sort of isolated *butte*—was the only eminence of any considerable elevation for miles around; and the site of the camp was upon the plain that stretched away from its base—apparently beyond limit!

The plain was what is termed a "pecan" prairie—that is, a prairie half-covered with groves, copses, and lists of woodland—in which the predominating tree is the pecan—a species of hickory (*carya olivacea*), bearing an oval, edible nut of commercial value. Between the groves and mottes of timber single trees stood apart, their heads fully developed by the free play given to their branches. These park-looking trees, with the coppice-like groves of the pecan, lent an air of high civilization to the landscape; and a winding stream, whose water, under the still lingering rays, glistened with the sheen of silver, added to the deception. Withal, it was a wilderness—a beautiful wilderness. Human hands had never planted those groves—human agency had naught to do with the formation or adornment of that lovely landscape.

Upon the bank of the stream, and about half a mile from the base of the hill, stood the Indian camp. A glance at the position showed how well it had been chosen—not so much for defense as to protect it against a surprise.

Assuming the lodge—there was but one—as the center of the camp, it was placed upon the edge of a small grove, and fronting the stream.

From the tent to the water's edge the plain sloped gently downward, like the glacis of a fortification. The smooth sward that covered the space between the trees and the water was the ground of the camp. On this could be seen the dusky warriors, some afoot, standing in listless attitudes, or moving about; others reclining upon the grass, and still others bending over the fires, as if engaged in the preparation of their evening meal.

A line of spears, regularly placed, marked the allotment of each. The slender shafts, nearly five yards in length, rose tall above the turf—like masts of distant ships—displaying their profusion of pennons and bannerets of painted plumes and human hair. At the base of each could be seen the gaudy shield, the bow and quiver, the embroidered pouch and medicine-bag of the owner; and grouped around many of them appeared objects of a far different character—objects that we could not contemplate without acute emotion. They were women; enough of light still ruled the sky to show us their faces; they were white women—the captives.

Strange were my sensations as I regarded those forms and faces; but they were far off—even a lover's eye was unequal to the distance.

Flanking the camp on right and left were the horses. They occupied a broad belt of ground—for they were staked out to feed—and each was allowed the length of his lasso. Their line converged to the rear, and met behind the grove—so that the camp was embraced by an arc of browsing animals, the river forming its cord. Across the stream the encampment did not extend.

I have said that the spot was well selected to guard against a surprise. Its peculiar adaptability consisted in the fact that the little grove that backed the camp was the only timber within a radius of a thousand yards. All around, and even on the opposite side of the stream, the plain was treeless and free from cover of any kind. There were no inequalities of ground, neither "brake, bush, nor scur," to shelter the approach of an enemy.

Had this position been chosen, or was it accidental? In such a place and at such a time, it was not likely they had any fear of a surprise; but with the Indian, caution is so habitually exercised that it becomes almost an instinct; and doubtless under such a habit, and without any forethought whatever, the savages had fixed upon the spot where they were encamped. The grove gave them wood; the stream, water; the plain, pabulum for their horses. With one of these last for their own food, they had all the requisites of an Indian camp.

At the first glance I saw the strength of their position—not so much with the eye of a soldier, as with that of a hunter and bush-fighter did I perceive it. In a military sense, it offered no point of defense; but it could not be approached by stratagem, and that is all the horse-Indian ever fears. Alarm him not too suddenly—give him five minutes' warning, and he cannot be attacked. If superior in strength, you may chase him; but you must be better mounted than he to bring him to close combat. Retreat, not defense, is generally the leading idea of Comanche strategy, unless when opposed to a Mexican foe. Then he will stand fight with the courage of a master.

As I continued to gaze at the Indian encampment, my heart sunk within me. Except under cover of a dark night—a very dark night—it could not be entered. The keenest spy could not have approached it; it appeared unapproachable.

The same thought must at that moment have occupied the minds of my companions; I saw the gloom of disappointment on the brows of all as they knelt beside me silent and sullen. None of them said a word; they had not spoken since we came upon the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NO COVER.

In silence I continued to scrutinize the camp, but could discover no mode of approaching it secretly or in safety.

The adjacent plain, for nearly a thousand yards' radius, was a smooth grass-covered prairie. Even the grass was short; it would scarcely have sheltered the smallest game—much less afford cover for the body of a man—much less for that of a horse.

I should willingly have crawled on hands and knees, over the half-mile that separated us from the encampment; but that would have been of no service; I might just as well have walked erect. Erect or prostrate, I should be seen all the same by the occupants of the camp, or the guards of the horses. Even if I succeeded in effecting an entrance within the lines, what then? Even should I succeed in finding Isolina, what then? what hope was there of our getting off?

There was no probability of our being able to pass the lines unseen—not the least. We should certainly be pursued, and what chance for us to escape? It was not probable we could run for a thousand yards with the hne and cry after us? No; we should be overtaken, recaptured, speared or tomahawked upon the spot!

The design I had formed was to bring my

horse as close as possible to the camp; to leave him under cover, and within such a distance as would make it possible to reach him by a run, then mounting with my betrothed in my arms, to gallop on to my comrades. The men, I had intended, should be placed in ambush, as near to the camp as the nature of the ground would permit.

But my preconceived plan was entirely frustrated by the peculiar situation of the Indian encampment. I had anticipated that there would be either trees, brushwood, or broken ground in its neighborhood, under shelter of which we might approach it. To my chagrin, I now saw that there was none of the three. There was no timber nearer than the grove in which we were lying—the copse excepted—and to have reached this would have been to enter the camp itself.

We appeared to have advanced to the utmost limit possible that afforded cover. A few feet further would have carried us outside the margin of the wood, and then we should have been as conspicuous to the denizens of the camp, as they now were to us. Forward we dared not stir—not a step further.

I was puzzled and perplexed. Once more I turned my eyes upon the sky, but I drew not thence a ray of hope; the heavens were too bright; the sun had gone down in the west; but in the east was rising, full, round, and red, almost his counterpart. How I should have welcomed an eclipse! I thought of Omnipotent power: I thought of the command of the Israelitish captain. I should have j yed to see the shadow of the opaque earth pass over that shining orb, and rob it of its borrowed light, if only for a single hour!

Eclipse or cloud there was none—no prospect of one or other—no hope either from the earth or the sky.

Verily, then, must I abandon my design, and adopt some other for the rescue of my betrothed? What other?

I could think of none; there was no other that might be termed a plan. We might gallop forward, and openly attack the camp! Sheer desperation alone could impel us to such a course, and the result would be ruin to all—to her among the rest. We could not hope to rescue her—nine to a hundred—for we saw and could now count our dusky foemen. They would see us afar off; would be prepared to receive us—prepared to hurl their masses upon us—to destroy us altogether. Sheer desperation!

What other plan?—what?—Something of one occurred to me at that moment; a slight shadow of it had crossed my mind before. It seemed practicable, though fearfully perilous; but what of peril? It was not the time, nor was I in the mood, to regard danger. Anything short of the prospect of certain death had no terror for me then; and even this I should have preferred to failure.

We had along with us the horse of the captive Comanche. Stanfield had brought the animal, having left his own in exchange. I thought of mounting the Indian horse, and riding him into the camp. In this consisted the whole of the scheme that now presented itself.

Surely the idea was a good one—a slight alteration of my original plan. I had already undertaken to play the role of an Indian warrior, while within the camp; it would only require me to begin the personation outside the lines, and make my *entree* along with my *debut*. There would be more dramatic appropriateness, with a proportionate increase of danger.

But I did not jest thus; I had no thought of merriment at the time. The travesty I had undertaken was no burlesque.

The worst feature of this new scheme was the increased risk of being brought in contact with the friends of the warrior of the red hand—of being accosted by them, and of course expected to make reply. How could I avoid meeting them—one or more of them? If interrogated, how shun making answer? I knew a few words of the Comanche tongue, but not enough to hold a conversation in it. Either my false accent or my voice would betray me! True, I might answer in Spanish. Many of the Comanches speak this language; but my using it would appear a suspicious circumstance.

There was another source of apprehension: I could not confide in the Indian horse. He had endeavored to fling Stanfield all along the way—kicking violently, and biting at his Saxon rider while seated upon his back. Should he behave in a similar manner with me while entering the camp, it would certainly attract the attention of the Indian guards. It would lead to scrutiny and suspicion.

Still another fear: even should I succeed in the main points—in entering the camp, finding the captive, and wresting her from her jailers—how after? I could never depend upon this capricious mustang to carry us clear of the pursuit—there would be others as swift, perhaps swifter than he, and we should only be carried back to die. Oh! that I could have taken my own steed near to the line of yonder guard—oh! that I could have hidden him there!

It might not be; I saw that it could not be; and I was forced to abandon the thoughts of it. I had well-nigh made up my mind to risk all

the chances of my assumed character, by mounting the Indian horse. To my comrades I imparted the idea, and asked their counsel.

All regarded it as fraught with danger; one or two advised me against it. They were those who did not understand my motives—who could not comprehend the sentiment of love—who knew not the strength and courage which that noble passion may impart. Little understood they how its emotions inspire to deeds of daring—how love absorbs all selfishness—even life becoming a secondary consideration, when weighed against the happiness or safety of its object. These rude men had never loved as I. I gave no ear to their too prudent counsels.

Others acknowledged the danger, but saw not how I could act differently. One or two had in their life's course experienced a touch of tender feeling akin to mine. These could appreciate; and counseled me in consonance with my half-formed resolution. I liked their counsel best.

One had not yet spoken—one upon whose advice I placed a higher value than upon the combined wisdom of all the others. I had not yet taken the opinion of the earless trapper.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

RUBE CONSULTING HIS ORACLE.

He was standing apart from the rest—leaning, I should rather say, for his body was not erect, but diagonal. In this attitude it was propped by his rifle, the butt of which was steadied against the stump of a tree, while the muzzle appeared to rest upon the bridge of Rube's own nose.

As the man and the piece were about of a length, the two just placed in juxtaposition presented the exact figure of an inverted V, and the small close-capped skull of the trapper formed a sufficiently tapering apex to the angle. Both his hands were clasped round the barrel, near its muzzle, his fingers interlocking, while the thumbs lay flat—one upon each side of his nose.

At first glance, it was difficult to tell whether he was gazing into the barrel of the piece, or beyond it upon the Indian camp.

The attitude was not new to him nor to me; it was not the first time I had observed him in a posture precisely similar. I knew it was his favorite pose, when any question of unusual difficulty required all the energy of his "instincts." He was now, as often of yore, consulting his "divinity," presumed to dwell far down within the dark tube of "Targuts."

After a time, all the others ceased to speak, and stood watching him. They knew that no step would be taken before Rube's advice had been received; and they waited with more or less patience for him to speak.

Full ten minutes passed, and still the old trapper neither stirred nor spoke. Nor lip nor muscle of him was seen to move; the eyes alone could be detected in motion, and these small orbs, scintillating in their deep sockets, were the only signs of life which he showed. Standing rigid and still, he appeared, not a statue, but a scarecrow, propped up by a stick; and the long, brown, weather-washed rifle did not belie the resemblance.

Full ten minutes passed, and still he spoke not; his "oracle" had not yet yielded its response.

I have said that at the first glance it was difficult to tell whether the old man was gazing into the barrel of his gun or beyond it. After watching him closely, I observed that he was doing both. Now his eyes were a little raised, as if he looked upon the plain—anon they were lowered, and apparently peering into the tube. He was drawing the data of his problem from facts—he was trusting to his divinity for the solution.

For a long time he kept up this singular process of conjuration—alternating his glances in equal distribution between the hollow cylinder and the circle of vision that comprehended within its circumference the Comanche encampment.

The others began to grow impatient; all were interested in the result, and not without reason. Standing upon the limits of a life-danger, it is not strange they should feel anxiety about the issue.

Thus far, however, none had offered to interrupt or question the queer old man. None dared. One or two of the party had already had a taste of his quality when fretted or interfered with, and no one desired to draw upon himself the sharp "talk" of the earless trapper.

Garey at length approached, but not until Rube, with a triumphant toss of his head and a scarcely audible "wheep" from his thin lips, showed signs that the consultation had ended, and that the "joss" who dwelt at the bottom of his rifle-barrel had vouchsafed an answer!

I had watched him with the rest. I liked that expressive hitch of the head; I liked the low, but momentous sibilation that terminated the *seance* between him and his familiar spirit. They were signs that the knot was unraveled—that the old trapper had devised some feasible plan by which the Indian camp might be entered.

Garey and I drew near, but not to question

him; we understood him too well for that. We knew that he must be left free to develop his purpose in his own time; and we left him free—simply placing ourselves by his side.

"Wal, Billee!" he said, after drawing a long breath, "an' y'urself, young fellur! what do 'ee both think o' this hyur bizness: looks ugly, don't it—eh, boyees?"

"Tarnal ugly," was Garey's laconic answer.

"Thort so meself at fu'st."

"Thar ain't no plan o' gettin' in yander," said the young trapper, in a desponding tone.

"The doose thur ain't! what greenhorn put thet idee inter y'ur brain-pan, Billee?"

"Wal, thar are a plan; but 'tain't much o' a one; we've been talkin' it over hyar."

"Le's hear it," rejoined Rube, with an exulting chuckle—"le's hev it, boyeel an' quick, Billee, for time's dodrotted precious 'bout now. Wal?"

"It's jest this, Rube, neyther less nor more; the capt'n proposes to take the Injun's hoss, and ride straight into thar camp."

"Straight custrut in, do 'ee?"

"Ov coorse; it 'u'd be no use goin' about the bush; they kin see him a-comin' from ony side."

"I'll be durned ef they kin—that I'll be durned. Waghl! they c'u'dn't 'a' see me—that they c'u'dn't, ef ivery niggur o' 'em hed the eyes o' an Argoose es hed eyes all over him—that they c'u'dn't, Billee."

"How?" I inquired. "Do you mean to say that it is possible for any one to approach your camp without being observed? Is that what you mean, Rube?"

"Thet ur preezactly whet I mean, young fellur. No—not adzactly thet eyther. One o' you I didn't say: whet I sayed wur, that this hyur trapper, Rube Rawlins o' the Rocky Mountains, k'u'd slide inter yander 'campmint jest like greased lightnin' through a gooseberry-bush, 'ithout e'er an Injun seein' 'im; an' thet, too, ef the red-skinned va'mints hed more eyes in thur heads than they hev lice; which, accordin' to this child's reck'nin', 'u'd guv ivery squaw's son o' the gang as many peepers es thur ur spots in a peacock's tail, an' a wheen over to breed, I kalkerlate. No plan to git inter thur camp 'ithout bein' see'd! Waghl! yur gettin' green, Billee!"

"How can it be accomplished, Rube? Pray, explain! You know how impatient—"

"Don't git unpayshint, young fellur! thet ur's no use whetsomdive. Y'u'll need payshinse, an' a good grist o' thet ur, afore ye kin warm y'ur shins at yander fires; but 'ee kin do it, an' in the nick o' time too, ef y'u'll go preezactly accordin' to whet old Rube tells ye, an' keep y'ur eye well skinned and y'ur teeth from chatterin'; I knows y'u'll do all thet. I knows y'ur weasel to the back o' y'ur neck, an' kin whip y'ur weight in wildeat any day i' the year. Now! D'y'ur agree to foller my direckshuns?"

"I promise faithfully to act according to your advice."

"Thet ur sensible sayed—durnation'd sensible. Wal, then, I'll gi' ye my device."

As Rube said this, he moved forward to the edge of the timber, making a sign for Garey and myself to follow.

On reaching its outer edge—but still within cover—he dropped down upon his knees, behind some evergreen bushes.

I imitated his example, and knelt upon his right, while Garey crouched down on the left.

Our eyes were directed upon the Indian camp, of which, and the plain around it, we had a good view—as good as could be obtained under the light of a brilliant moon, alas! too brilliant!

After we had surveyed the scene for some moments in silence, the old trapper descended to begin the conversation.

CHAPTER XL.

THE TRAPPER'S COUNSEL.

"Now, Billee, an' you, young fellur, jest clap y'ur eyes on thet 'ere 'campmint, an' see ef thur ain't a road leadin' inter the very heart o' it, straight as the tail o' a skeart fox. 'Ee see it? eh?"

"Not under kiver?" replied Garey interrogatively.

"Unner kiver—ivery step o' the way—the best o' kiver."

Garey and I once more scrutinized the whole circumference of the encampment, and the ground adjacent. We could perceive no cover by which the camp could be approached. Surely there was none.

What could Rube mean? Were there clouds in the sky? Had he perceived some portent of coming darkness? and had his words reference to this?

I raised my eyes and swept the whole canopy with inquiring glances. Up to the zenith, around the horizon—east, west, north, and south—I looked for clouds, but looked in vain. A few light cirrhi floated high in the atmosphere; but these, even when crossing the moon's disk, cast no perceptible shadow. On the contrary they were tokens of settled weather; and moving slowly, almost fixed upon the face of the heavens, were evidence that no sudden

change might be expected. When the trapper talked of entering the camp under cover, he could not have meant under cover of darkness. What then?

"Don't see ony kiver, old hoss," rejoined Garey, after a pause; "neyther bush nor weed."

"Bush!" echoed Rube—"weed! who's talkin' 'bout weeds an' bushes! Thur's other ways o' hidin' y'ur karkidge 'sides stickin' it in a bush or unner a weed. Yur a-gettin' durnation'd pumpkin-headed, Billee Garey. I 'gin to think yur in the same purdicament as the young fellur hisself. Y'u've been a humbuggin' wi' one o' them ur Mexikin moochachers."

"No, Rube, no."

"Durn me, ef I don't b'lieve you hev, boy. I heern ye tell one o' 'em—"

"What?"

"Waghl! ye know well enuff. Didn't 'ee tell one o' 'em gurls at the rancherie that ye loved her as hard as a mule kud kick?—sartinly ye did; them wur yur preezact words, Billee."

"I was only jokin', hoss."

"Putty jokin' thet ur 'll be when I gits back to Bent's Fort, and tell yur Coco squaw. He, he, he—ho, ho, hoo! Geehosopha! thur will be a rumpus bumpus!"

"Nonsense, Rube; thar's nothin' ov it."

"Thur must 'a' be; y'ur brain-pan's out o' order, Billee; ye hain't hed a clur idee for days back. Bushes! an' weeds too! Waghl! who seyed thur wur bushes! Whur's y'ur eyes? d' yur see a bank?"

"A bank!" echoed Garey and I simultaneously.

"Ye es," drawled Rube—"a bank. I guess thur's a bank right afore y'ur noses, ef both o' yur ain't as blind as the kittlins o' a 'possum. Now, do 'ee see it?"

Neither of us made reply to the final interrogatory. For the first time, we began to comprehend Rube's meaning; and our eyes as well as thoughts were suddenly directed upon the object indicated by his words—the bank of the stream—for to that he referred.

I have stated that the little river ran close to the Indian lines, and on one side formed the boundary of the camp. We could tell that the current was toward us; for the stream, on reaching the hill upon which we were, turned sharply off, and swept round its base. The Indian camp was on the left bank—though upon its right when viewed up-stream, as we were regarding it. Any one proceeding up the left bank must therefore necessarily pass within the lines, and through among the horses that were staked nearest to the water.

It need not be supposed that under our keen scrutiny the stream had hitherto escaped observation; I myself had long ago thought of it—as a means of covering my approach—and time after time had my eyes dwelt upon it, but without result; in its channel I could perceive no shelter from observation. Its banks were low, and without either rush or bush upon them. The green turf of the prairie stretched up to the very brink, and scarcely twelve inches below its level was the surface of the current water. This was especially the case along the front of the encampment, and for some distance above and below.

Any one endeavoring to enter the camp by stealing up the channel, must have gone completely under the water, for a swimmer could have been observed upon its surface; even if a man could have approached in this way, there was no hope that a horse could be taken with him; and without the horse, what prospect of ultimate escape?

It had seemed to me impossible. More than once had I taken into consideration, and as often rejected, the idea.

Not so Rube. It was the very scheme he had conceived, and he now proceeded to point out its practicability.

"Now, theen—'ees see a bank, do 'ee?"

"'Tain't much o' a bank," replied Garey, rather discouragingly.

"No; 'tain't as high as Massoora bluffs, nor the kenyns o' Snake River—thet nob'dy durnies; but ef 'tain't as high as it mount be, it ur ivry minnit a-gettin' higherer, I reck'n."

"Getting higher, you think?"

"Ye-es; or whet ur putty consid'able the same thing thet 'other ur a-gettin' lower."

"The water, you mean?"

"The water ur a-fallin'—gwine down by inches at a jump; an' in an hour from this, thur'll be bluffs aforent o' the camp half a yurd high—thet's whet thur'll be."

"And you think I could get into the camp by creeping under them?"

"Sure o't. Whet's to hinner ye? it ur easy as fallin' off o' a log."

"But the horse—how could I bring him near?"

"Jest the same way as y'urself. I tell yer the bed o' thet river ur deep enuf to hide the biggest hoss in creea-hun. 'Tur now full, for the reezun thur's been a fresh in cousykwince o' last night's rain: 'ee needn't mind thet—the hoss kin wade or swim eyther, an' the bank 'll kiver 'im from the eyes o' the Injuns. You kin leave 'im in the river."

"In the water?"

"In coorse—y'ur hoss 'll stan' thur; an' ef he

don't, you kin tie his nose to the bank. Don't be skeart, but 'ee kin take 'im as near as 'ee please; but don't git too far to wind'ard, else them mustangs 'll smell 'im, and then it ur all up both wi' y'urself an' y'ur hoss. About two hundred yurds ull be y'ur likeliest distance. Ef ye git the gurl clur, ye kin easy run thet. I reck'n: put straight for the hoss; an' whun yur mounted, gallip like h—! Put straight up hyer for the timmer, whur we'll be cached; an' then, durn 'em! ef the red-skins don't catch goss out o' our rifles. Wagh! that's the way to do the thing—it ur."

Certainly, this plan appeared practicable enough. The sinking of the water was a new element; it had escaped my observation, though Rube had noted it. It was this that had delayed him so long in giving his opinion; he had been watching it while leaning upon his rifle, though none of the rest of us had thought of such a thing. He remembered the heavy rain of the night before; he saw that it had caused a freshet in the little river; that its subsidence had begun; and, as in most prairie-streams, was progressing with rapidity. His keen eye had detected a fall of several inches during the half-hour we had been upon the ground. I could myself observe, now the thing was pointed out to me, that the banks were higher than before.

Certainly, the idea of approaching by the stream had assumed a more feasible aspect. If the channel should prove deep enough, I might get the horse sufficiently near; the rest would have to be left to stratagem and chance.

"Y'ur ridin' in the Injun hoss," said Rube, "u'd niver do: it mout, on the wu'st pinch; an' ef 'ee don't git in the t'other way, 'ee kin still try it; but ye k'u'd niver git acrost through the cavayard 'thout stampeedin' 'em; 'em mustangs 'u'd be sure to make sich a snortin', an' stompin', an' whigherin', as 'u'd bring the bul' campmint about ye; an' some o' the sharp-eyed niggurs 'u'd be sartin' to find out y'ur hide wur white. T'other way es I've desized ur fur the safest—it ur."

I was not long in making up my mind. Rube's counsel decided me, and I resolved to act accordingly.

CHAPTER XXI.

TAKING TO THE WATER.

I SPENT but little time in preparations; these had been made already. It remained only to tighten my saddle-girths, look to the caps of my revolvers, and place both pistols and knife in the belt behind my back, where the weapons would be concealed by the pendent robe of jaguar-skins. In a few minutes I was ready.

I still loitered a while, to wait for the falling of the water; not long—my anxiety did not permit me to tarry long. The hour of the council might be nigh—I might be too late for the crisis. Not long did I loiter.

It was not necessary. Even by the moonlight we could distinguish the dark line of the bank separating the grassy turf from the surface of the water. The rippling current was shining like silver lace, and, by contrast, the brown earthy strip that rose vertically above it could be observed more distinctly. It was sensibly broader.

I could wait no longer. I leaped into the saddle. My comrades crowded around me to say a parting word; and with a wish or a prayer upon their lips, one after another pressed my hand. Some doubted of their ever seeing me again—I could tell this from the tone of their leave-taking—others were more confident. All vowed to revenge me if I fell.

Rube and Garey went with me down the hill. At the point where the stream impinged upon the hill, there were bushes; these continued up the declivity, and joined the timber upon the summit. Under their cover we descended, reaching the bank just at the salient angle of the bend. A thin skirting of similar bushes ran around the base of the hill, and we now perceived that by following the path on which we had come, the ambuscade might have been brought a little nearer to the camp. But the cover was not so good as the grove upon the summit, and in case of a retreat, it would be necessary to gallop up the naked face of the slope, and thus expose our numbers. It was decided, therefore, after a short consultation, to leave the men where they were.

From the bend, where we stood, to the Indian camp, the river trended almost in a straight line, and its long reach lay before our eyes like a band of shining metal. Along its banks, the bush extended no further. A single step toward the camp would have exposed us to the view of its occupants.

At this point, therefore, it was necessary for me to take to the water; and dismounting, I made ready for the immersion.

The trappers had spoken their last word of instruction and counsel; they had both grasped my hand, giving it a significant squeeze that promised more than words; but to these, too, they had given utterance.

"Don't be afeerd, capt'n!" said the younger. "Rube and I won't be far off. If we hear your pistols, we'll make a rush to r'st you, and meet you half-way anyhow; and if anything should happen amiss"—here Garey spoke with em-

phasis—"you may depend on't we'll take a bloody revenge."

"Yees!" echoed Rube, "we'll do jest thet. Thur'll be many a nick in Targuts afore next Krissmuss ef you ur rubbed out, young fellur; thet I sw'ar to ye. But don't be skeart! Keep y'ur eye sharp-skinned, an' y'ur claws steady, an' thur's no fear but y'u'll git clur. Oncest y'ur clur o' the camp, 'ee may reck'n on us. Put straight for the timmer, and gallip as ef Ole Scratch wur a-gruppin' at the tail o' y'ur critter."

I waited to hear no more, but leading Moro down the bank, at a place where it sloped, I stepped gently into the current. My well-trained steed followed without hesitation, and in another instant we were both breast-deep in the flood.

The water was just the depth I desired. There was a half-yard of bank that rose vertically above the surface; and this was sufficient to shelter either my own head, as I stood erect, or the frontlet of my horse. Should the channel continue of uniform depth as far as the camp, the approach would be easy indeed; and, for certain hydrographic reasons, I was under the belief it would.

The plumes of the Indian bonnet rose above the level of the meadow-turf; and as the feathers—dyed of gay colors—would have formed a conspicuous object, I took off the gaudy head-dress, and carried it in my hand.

I also raised the robe of jaguar-skin over my shoulders, in order to keep it dry; and for the same reason, temporarily carried my pistols above the water-line.

The making of these slight alterations occupied only a minute or so; and, as soon as they were completed, I moved forward through the water.

The very depth of the stream proved a circumstance in my favor. In wading, both horse and man make less noise in deep than in shallow water; and this was an important consideration. The night was still—too still for my wishes—and the plunging sound would have been heard afar off; but fortunately there were rapids below—just where the stream forced its way through the spur of the hill—and the hissing sough of these, louder in the still night, was borne upon the air to the distance of many miles. Their noise, to my own ears, almost drowned the plashing made by Moro and myself. I had noted this *point d'avantage* before embarking upon the enterprise.

At the distance of two hundred yards from the bushes, I paused to look back. My purpose was to fix in my memory the direction of the hill, and more especially the point where my comrades had been left in ambush; in the event of a close pursuit, it would not do to mistake their exact situation.

I easily made out the place, and observed that for several reasons, a better could not have been chosen. The trees that timbered the crest of the hill were of a peculiar kind—none more so upon the earth. They were a species of arborescent yucca, then unknown to botanists. Many of them were forty feet in height, and their thick angular branches and terminal fascicles of rigid leaves outlined against the sky formed a singular, almost an unearthly spectacle. It was unlike any other vegetation upon earth, more resembling a grove of cast-iron than a wood of exogenous trees.

Why I regarded the spot as favorable for an ambush, was chiefly this—a party approaching it from the plain, and climbing the hill, might fancy a host of enemies in their front; for the trees themselves, with their heads of radiating blades, bore a striking resemblance to an array of plumed gigantic warriors. Many of the yuccas were only six feet in height, with tufted heads and branchless trunks as gross as the body of a man, and they might readily have been mistaken for human beings.

I perceived at a glance the advantage of the position. Should the Indians pursue me, and I could succeed in reaching the timber before them, a volley from my comrades would check the pursuers, however numerous. The nine rifles would be enough, with a few shots from the revolvers. The savages would fancy nine hundred under the mystifying shadows of that spectral-like grove.

With confidence, strengthened by these considerations, I once more turned my face upstream; and, breasting the current, waded on.

CHAPTER XLII.

UP-STREAM.

My progress was far from being rapid. The water was occasionally deeper or shallower, but generally rising above my hips—deep enough to render my advance a task of time and difficulty. The current was of course against me; and, though not very swift, seriously impeded me. I could have advanced more rapidly, but for the necessity of keeping my head and that of my horse below the escarpment of the bank. At times it was a close fit, with scarcely an inch to spare; and in several places I was compelled to move with my neck bent, and my horse's nose held close down to the surface of the water.

At intervals I paused to rest myself—for the exertion of wading against the current wearied

me, and took away my breath. This was particularly the case when I required to go in a crouching attitude; but I chose my resting-places where the channel was deepest, and where I could stand erect.

I was all the while anxious to look up and take a survey of the camp; I wished to ascertain its distance and position; but I dared not raise my head above the level of the bank; the sward that crowned it was smooth as a lawn meadow, and the edge-line of the turf even and unbroken. Had I shown my head above it, it might have been seen in that clear white light. I dared not show either hand or head.

I had advanced I knew not how far, but I fancied I must be near the lines. All the way I had kept close under the left bank—which, as Rube had predicted, now rose a full half yard above the water line. This was a favorable circumstance; and another equally so was the fact that the moon on that—the eastern side—was yet low in the sky, and consequently the bank flung a broad black shadow that extended nearly half-way across the stream. In this shadow I walked and its friendly darkness sheltered both myself and my horse.

I fancied I must be near the lines, and longed to reconnoiter them, but, for reasons already given, dared not.

I was equally afraid to make any further advance—for that might be still more perilous. I had already noted the direction of the wind; it blew from the river, and toward the camp; and should I bring my horse opposite the line of the mustangs, I would then be directly to windward of them, and in danger from their keen nostrils. They would be almost certain to take up the scent of my steed, and utter their warning snorts. The breeze was light, but so much the worse. There was sufficient to carry the smell and not enough to drown the plunging noise necessarily made by my horse moving through the water, with the occasional hollow pounding of his hoofs upon the rocks at the bottom.

If I raised my head over the bank there was the danger of being seen; if I advanced, the prospect was one of equal peril of being scented.

For some moments I stood hesitating, uncertain as to whether I should leave my horse, or lead him a little further. I heard noises from the camp, but they were not distinct enough to guide me.

I looked back down the river in the hope of being able to calculate the distance I had come, and by that means decide where I was, but my observation furnished no data by which I could determine my position. With my eyes almost on a level with the surface of the water I could not judge satisfactorily of distance.

I turned my face up-stream again and scrutinized the parapet line of the bank.

Just then I saw an object over its edge that answered well to guide me. It was the croup and hip bones of a horse, one of the mustangs staked near the bank. I saw neither the head nor shoulders of the animal; its hind-quarters were toward the stream; its head was to the grass—it was browsing.

The sight gratified me. The mustang was full two hundred yards above the point I had reached. I knew that its position marked the outer line of the encampment. I was in the very place where I wanted to be, about two hundred yards from the lines. Just at that distance I desired to leave my horse.

I had taken the precaution to bring with me my picket-pin—one of the essentials of the prairie traveler. It was the work of a moment to delve it into the bank. I needed not to drive it with violence; my well-trained steed never broke fastening, however slight. With him the stake was only required as a sign that he was not free to wander.

In a moment, then, he was staked, and with a "whisper" I parted from him and kept on upstream.

I had not waded a dozen yards further when I perceived a break in the line of the bank. It was a little gully that led slantingly from the level of the prairie down to the bed of the stream. Its counterpart I perceived on the opposite side. The two indicated a ford or crossing used by buffaloes, wild-horses and other denizens of the prairie.

At first I viewed it with apprehension. I feared it might uncover my body to the eyes of the enemy; but on coming opposite my fears were allayed; the slope was abrupt, and the high ground screened me as before. There would be no danger in passing the place.

As I was about moving on an idea arrested me, and I paused to regard the gully with a look of greater interest. I perceived an advantage in it.

I had been troubled about the position in which I had left my horse. Should I succeed in getting back, of course it would be under the pressure of hot pursuit, and my steed was not conveniently placed; his back was below the level of the bank. He might easily be mounted, but how should I get him out of the channel of the stream? Only by a desperate leap might he reach the plain above; but he might fail in the effort—time might be lost, when time and speed would be most wanted.

I had been troubled with this thought; it need

trouble me no longer. The "crossing" afforded easy access either to or from the bed of the river—the very thing I wanted.

I was not slow to profit by the discovery. I turned back, and having released the rein, led my horse gently up to the break.

Choosing a spot under the highest part of the bank, I fastened him as before, and again left him.

I now moved with more ease and confidence, but with increased caution. I was getting too near to risk making the slightest noise in the water; a single splash might betray me.

It was my intention to keep within the channel until I had passed the point where the horses were staked. By so doing I should avoid crossing the line of the horse-guards, and, what was quite as important, that of the horses themselves—for I was equally apprehensive of being discovered by the latter. Once inside their circle they would take no notice of me—for doubtless there would be other Indians within sight; and I trusted to my well-counterfeited semblance of savagery to deceive the eyes of those equine sentinels.

I did not wish to go far beyond their line; that would bring me in front of the camp itself—too near its fires and its idle groups.

I had noticed before starting that there was a broad belt between the place occupied by the men and that where their horses were staked. This "neutral" ground was little used by the camp loungers, and somewhere on the edge of it I was desirous of making my *entree*.

I succeeded to my utmost wishes. Closely hugging the bank, I passed the browsing mustangs—under their very noses I glided past, for I could hear them munching the herbage right over me—but so silently did I steal along, that neither snort nor hoof-stroke heralded my advance.

In a few minutes I was sufficiently beyond them for my purpose.

I raised my head; slowly and gently I raised it, till my eyes were above the level of the prairie slope.

No one was near. I could see the swarth savages grouped around their fires; but they were a hundred yards off, or more. They were capering and talking and laughing; but no ear was bent, and no eye seemed turned toward me. No one was near.

I grasped the bank with my hands, and drew myself up. Slowly and silently I ascended, like some demon from the dark trap door of a stage.

On my knees I reached the level of the turf; and, then gently rising to my feet, I stood erect within the limits of the Indian camp—to all appearance as complete a savage as any upon the ground!

CHAPTER XLIII.

COUP-D'ŒIL OF THE CAMP.

FOR some minutes I stood motionless as a statue; I stirred neither hand nor foot, lest the movement should catch the eye either of the horse-guards or those moving around the fires.

I had already donned my plumed head dress before climbing out of the channel; and after getting on the bank, my first thought was to replace my pistols in the belt behind my back.

The movement was stealthily made, and with like stealthy action I suffered the mantle of jaguar skins to drop from my shoulders, and hang to its full length. I had saved the robe from getting wet, and its ample skirt now served me in concealing my soaked breech-cloth as well as the upper half of my leggings. These and the moccasins were, of course, saturated with water, but I had not much uneasiness about that. In a prairie camp, and upon the banks of a deep stream, an Indian with wet leggings could not be a spectacle to excite suspicion; there would be many reasons why my counterpart might choose to immerse his copper-colored extremities in the river. Moreover, the buckskin—dressed Indian fashion—was speedily casting the water; it would soon drip dry, or even if wet, would scarcely be observed under such a light.

The spot where I had "landed" chanced to be one of the least conspicuous in the whole area of the camp. I was just between two lights—the red glare of the camp fires and the mellow beams of the moon; and the atmospheric confusion occasioned by the meeting of the distinct kinds of light favored me, by producing a species of optical delusion. It was but slight, and I could easily be seen from the center of the camp, but not with sufficient distinctness for my disguise to be penetrated by any one; therefore, it was hardly probable that any of the savages would approach or trouble their heads about me. I might pass for one of themselves, indulging in a solitary saunter, yielding himself to a moment of abstraction or melancholy. I was well enough acquainted with Indian life to know that there was nothing *outré* or unlikely in this behavior; such conduct was perfectly *en regle*.

I did not remain long on that spot—only long enough to catch the salient features of the scene.

I saw there were many fires, and around each was grouped a number of human forms—some

squatted, some standing. The night was cold enough to make them draw near to the burning logs; and for this reason but few were wandering about—a fortunate circumstance for me.

There was one fire larger than the rest; from its dimensions, it might be termed a "bonfire," such as is made by the flattering and flunkeyish peasantry of old-world lands, when they welcome home the squire and the count. It was placed directly in front of the solitary tent, and not a dozen paces from its entrance. Its blazing pile gave forth a flood of red light that reached even to the spot where I stood, and flickered in my face. I even fancied I could feel its glow upon my cheeks.

Around this fire were many forms of men—all of them standing up. I could see the faces of those who were upon its further side, but only the figures of those on the nearer.

The former I could see with almost as much distinctness as if I had been close beside them; I could trace the lineaments of their features—the painted devices on their breasts and faces—the style of their habiliments.

The sight of these last somewhat astonished me. I had expected to see red-skinned warriors in leggings, moccasins, and breech-cloth, with heads naked or plumed, and shoulders draped under brown robes of buffalo-skin. Some such there were, but not all of them were so costumed; on the contrary, I beheld savages shrouded in serapes and cloaks of broadcloth, with calzoneros on their legs, and upon their heads huge hats of black glaze—regular Mexican sombreros! In short, I beheld numbers of them in full Mexican costume!

Others, again, were dressed somewhat in a military fashion, with helmets or stiff shakos, ill-fitting uniform coats of red or blue cloth, oddly contrasting with the brown buckskin that covered their legs and feet.

With some astonishment I observed these "fancy dresses," but my surprise passed away when I reflected upon who were the men before me, and whence they had lately come, where they had been, and on what errand. It was no travesty, but a scene of actual life. The savages were clad in the spoils they had captured from civilization.

I need not have been at such pains with my toilet; under any guise I could scarcely have looked odd in the midst of such a motley crew: even my own uniform might have passed muster—all except the color of my skin.

Fortunately, a few of the band still preserved their native costume—a few appeared in full paint and plumes—else I should have been too Indian for such a company.

It cost not a minute to note these peculiarities, nor did I stay to observe them minutely; my eyes were in search of Isolina.

I cast inquiring glances on all sides; I scrutinized the groups around the different fires; I saw others—women, whom I knew to be captives—but I saw not her.

I scanned their forms and the faces of those who were turned toward me. A glance would have been enough; I could easily have recognized her face under the firelight—under any light. It was not before me.

"In the tent—in the tent: she must be there!"

I determined to move away from the spot where I had hitherto been standing. My eye, quickened by the necessity of action, had fallen upon the copse that stretched along the entire background of the camp. At a glance I detected the advantage offered by its shadowy cover.

The tent, as already stated, was placed close to the edge of the timber; and in front of the tent was the great fire. Plainly, this was the gravitating point—the center of motive and motion. If aught of interest was to be enacted, there would lie the scene. In the lodge or near it would she be found—certainly she would be there; and there I resolved to seek her.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A FRIENDLY ENCOUNTER.

JUST then the shrill voice of a crier pealed through the camp, and I observed a general movement. I could not make out what the man said, but the peculiar intonation told that he was uttering some signal or summons. Something of importance was about to transpire.

The Indians now commenced circling around the blazing pile, meeting and passing each other, as if threading the mazes of some silent and solemn dance. Others were seen hastening up from distant parts of the camp, as if to observe the actions of those around the fire, or join with them in the movement.

I did not wait to watch them; their attention thus occupied gave me an opportunity of reaching the copse unobserved; and, without further ado, I started toward it.

I walked slowly, and with an assumed air of careless indifference. I counterfeited the Comanche walk—not that bold, free port—the magnificent and inimitable stride, so characteristic of Chippewa and Shawano, of Huron and Iroquois—but the shuffling gingery step of an English jockey; for such in reality is the gait of the Comanche Indian when afoot.

I must have played my part well. A savage, crossing from the horse-guards toward the

great fire, passed near me, and hailed me by name.

"Wakono!" cried he.

"Que cosa?" (Well, what matter?) I replied in Spanish, imitating as well as I could the Indian voice and accent. It was a venture, but I was taken at a strait, and could well remain silent.

The man appeared some little surprised at being addressed in the language of Mexico; nevertheless, he understood it, and made rejoinder.

"You hear the summons, Wakono? Why do you not come forward? The council meets; Hissoo-royo is already there."

I understood what was said—more from the Indian's gestures than his speech—though the words "summons," "council," and the name "Hissoo-royo," helped me to comprehend his meaning. I chanced to know the Comanche epithets for the two first, and also that Hissoo-royo (the Spanish wolf) was the Indian appellation of a Mexican renegade.

Though I understood what was said, I was not prepared with a reply. I dared not risk the answer in Spanish; for I knew not the extent of Wakono's proficiency in the Andalusian tongue.

I felt myself in a dilemma; and the importunate savage—no doubt some friend of Wakono himself—appeared determined to stick to me. How was I to get rid of him?

A happy idea came to my relief. Assuming an air of extreme dignity, and as though I did not wish to be disturbed in my meditations, I raised my hand and waved the Indian a parting salute; at the same time turning my head, I walked slowly away.

The Indian accepted the *conge*, and moved off, but evidently with an air of reluctance. As I glanced back over my shoulder, I could see him parting from the spot with a hesitating step; no doubt somewhat astonished at the strange behavior of his friend Wakono.

I did not look back again until I had placed myself under the shadow of the timber. Then I turned to reconnoiter; my friend had continued on; I saw him just entering among the crowd that circled around the great fire.

Screened from observation by the shadow, I could now pause and reflect. The trifling incident that had caused me some apprehension, had also helped me to some useful knowledge: First, I had learned my own name; second, that a council was about to take place; and thirdly, that the renegade, Hissoo-royo, had something to do with the council.

This was knowledge of importance; combined with my previous information, everything was now made clear. This council could be no other than the jury-trial between the renegade and the yet nameless chief; the same that was to decide to which belonged the right of property in my betrothed. It was about to meet; it had not assembled as yet. Then had I arrived in time. Neither white savage nor red savage had yet come into possession; neither had dared to lay hand on the coveted and priceless gem.

Isolina was still safe—thus singularly preserved from brutal contact. These dogs in the manger—their mutual jealousy had proved her protection!

I was consoled by the thought—strange source of consolation!

I was in time, but where was she? From my new position I had a still better view of the camp, its fires, and its denizens. She was nowhere to be seen!

"In the lodge, then—she must certainly be there—or—"

A new suspicion occurred to me: "She may be kept apart from the other captives—in the copse—she may be concealed in the copse until the sentence be pronounced?"

This last conjecture brought along with it hopes and resolves. I determined to search the copse. If I should find her there, my enterprise would be easy indeed; at all events, easier than I had anticipated. Though guarded by the savages, I should rescue her from their grasp. The lives of six men—perhaps twice that number—were under my belt. The odds of unarmed numbers would be nothing against the deadly bullets from my revolvers, and I perceived too that most of the savages had laid aside their weapons, confident in the security of their camp.

But I might find her alone, or perhaps with but a single jailer. The meeting of the council favored the supposition. The men would all be there—some to take part—others interested in the result, or merely from curiosity to watch the proceedings.

I stayed no longer to reflect; but gliding into the grove, commenced my search for the captive.

The ground was favorable to my progress; there was not much underwood, and the trees grew thinly; I could easily pass among them without the necessity of crouching and without making noise. The silent tread of the moccasin was in my favor, as also the dark shadowy foliage that stretched overhead, hiding the sky from my view.

The chief timber of the copse was the pecan.

hickory—almost an evergreen—and the trees were still in full leaf; only here and there, where the trunks stood far apart, did the moonbeams strike through the thick frondage. The surface of the ground was shrouded from her light; and the narrow aisles through which I passed were as dark as if no moon had been shining.

I threaded the pathways of the grove one after another, gliding through as rapidly as the path would permit; I entered every aisle and glade; I sought everywhere, even to the furthest limits of the wood. I saw naught of her for whom I searched.

"In the tent then—she must be there."

I turned my face toward the lodge; and, moving with stealthy step, soon arrived among the trees that stood in the rear.

I halted near the edge; and, separating the leaves with my hands, peered cautiously through. I had no need to search further—Isolina was before my eyes.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE COUNCIL.

YES, there was my betrothed—within sight, within hearing, almost within reach of my hands; and I dared not touch, I dared not speak, I scarcely dared look upon her!

My fingers trembled among the leaves—my heart rose and fell—I could feel within my breast its strokes, rapid and irregular—I could hear its sonorous vibration.

It was not at the first glance that I saw Isolina. On looking through the leaves, the *coup d'œil* was a scene that quite astonished me, and for a while occupied my attention. Since I had last gazed upon the great fire, the grouping around it had undergone an entire change; a new tableau was presented, that for the moment held me under a spell of surprise.

The fire no longer blazed, or only slightly, and when stirred; the logs had burned into coals, and now yielded a fainter light, but one more red and garish. It was steady nevertheless, and the vastness of the pile rendered it strong enough to illumine the camp-ground to its utmost limits.

The fire was still encircled by savages, but no longer standing, nor grouped irregularly, as I had before observed them; on the contrary, they were seated, or rather squatted at equal distances from each other, and forming a ring that girdled the huge mound of embers.

There were about twenty of these men—I did not count them—but I observed that all were in their native costume—leggings, and breech-cloth to the waist—nothing above, save the armlets and shell-ornaments of nose, ears, and neck. All were profusely painted with chalk, ocher, and vermilion. Beyond doubt, I was looking upon the "council."

The other Indians—they in "fancy dresses"—were still upon the ground; but they were standing behind, retired a pace or two from the circle, and in groups of two, three, or four, talking in low mutterings. Others were moving about at a still greater distance from the fire.

My observation of all these features of the scene did not occupy ten seconds of time—just so long as my eyes were getting accustomed to the light.

At the end of that interval, my glance rested upon Isolina, and there became fixed.

My fingers trembled among the leaves; my heart rose and fell; I could feel within my breast its strokes, rapid and irregular; I could hear its sonorous vibration.

In the chain of Indians that encircled the fire, there was a break—an interval of ten or a dozen feet. It was directly in front of the lodge, and above the fire; for the ground gently sloped from the tent toward the stream.

In this spot the captive was seated. Her situation was exactly between the lodge and the fire, and little retired behind the circle of the council. The tent intervening between her and my position, had prevented me from seeing her at first.

She was half-seated, half-reclining upon a robe of wolf-skins. I saw that her arms were free; I saw that her limbs were bound. Her back was to the tent, her face turned toward the council. I could not see it.

To recognize my betrothed, I did not need to look upon her face; her matchless form, outlined against the red embers, was easily identified. The full round curve of the neck—the oval lines of the head—the majestic sweep of the shoulders—the arms smooth and symmetrical—all these were familiar to my eyes, for oft had they dwelt on them in admiration. I could not be mistaken; the form before me was that graven upon my heart—it was Isolina's.

There was another salient point in this singular tableau, that could not escape observation. Beyond the fire, and directly opposite to where Isolina was placed, I saw another well-known object—the white steed!

He was not staked there, but haltered and held in hand by one of the Indians. He must have been lately brought upon the ground, for from neither of my former points of observation had I noticed him. He, like his mistress, was "on trial"—his ownership was also matter of dispute.

There was in sight one more object that interested me—not with friendly interest did I regard it—but with disgust and indignation.

Not seated in the council ring, nor standing among the idle groups, but apart from all, I beheld Hissoo-royo the renegade. Savage as were the red warriors, fiend-like as they appeared with their paint-smeard visages, not one looked so savage or fiend-like as he.

The features of this man were naturally bad; but the paint—for he had adopted this with every other vile custom of barbarian life—rendered their expression positively ferocious. The device upon his forehead was a death's-head and cross bones—done in white chalk—and upon his breast appeared the well-imitated semblance of a bleeding scalp—the appropriate symbols of a cruel disposition.

There was something unnatural in a white skin thus disfigured, for the native complexion was not hidden; here and there it could be perceived forming the ground of the motley elaboration—its pallid hue in strange contrast with the deeper colors that daubed it! It was not the canvas for such a picture.

Yet there the picture was—in red and yellow, black, white, and blue; there stood the deep-dyed villain.

I saw not his rival; I looked for him, but saw him not. Perhaps he was one of those who stood around—perhaps he had not yet come up. He was the son of the head-chief—perhaps he was inside the lodge? The last was the most probable conjecture.

The great calumet was brought forward and lit by the fire; it was passed round the circle, from mouth to mouth—each savage satisfying himself with a single draw from its tube.

I knew that this was the inauguration of the council. The trial was about to proceed.

CHAPTER XLVI.

MEASURING THE CHANCES.

THE situation in which I was placed by chance, could not have been better had I deliberately chosen it. I had under my eyes the council fire and council, the groups around—in short, the whole area of the camp.

What was of most importance, I could see without being seen. Along the edge of the copse there extended a narrow belt of shadow, similar to that which had favored me while in the channel, and produced by a like cause—for the stream and the selva of the grove were parallel to each other. The moonbeams fell obliquely upon the grove; and, under the thick foliage of the pecans, I was well screened from her light behind—while the lodge covered me from the glare of the fire in front.

I could not have been better placed for my purpose. I saw the advantage of the position, and resolved therefore to abide in it.

The observations and reflections thus given in detail occupied me but a few minutes of time. Thought is quick, and at that crisis mine was more than usually on the alert. Almost instantaneously did I perceive the points that most interested me, or had reference to my plans; almost instantaneously I had mastered the situation, and I next bent my mind upon the way to take advantage of it.

I saw there was but one way to proceed; my original scheme must be carried out. Under so many eyes, there was not the slightest chance that the captive could be stolen away; she must be taken openly, and by a bold stroke. Of this was I convinced.

The question arose, when should I make the attempt? At that moment?

She was not ten paces from where I stood! Could I rush forward, and with my knife set free her limbs? Might we then get off before the savages could fling themselves upon us?

Hopeless—impossible! She was too near them; she was too near the renegade who claimed her as his property.

He was standing almost over her, within distance of a single leap. In his belt I saw the long triangular blade of a Spanish knife. He could have cut me down ere I could have severed a cord of her fastenings. The attempt would fail; success was hopeless—impossible. I must wait for a better opportunity; and I waited.

I remembered Rube's last word of counsel, not to act too hastily—and his reasons, that if I must make a "despotic strike for it," to leave the grand *coup* to the last moment. The circumstances could be no more unfavorable than that now.

Under the influence of this idea, I checked my impatience, and waited.

I watched Hissoo-royo; I watched the squat forms around the fire; I watched the straggling groups behind them. In turn, my eyes wandered from one to the other. At intervals, too, they rested upon Isolina.

Up to this moment I had not seen her countenance; I saw only the reverse of that beautiful image so deeply graven upon my heart. But even then—under that suspense of peril—strange thoughts were passing within me. I felt a singular longing to look upon her face; I remembered the *herredero*.

It pleased fortune to smile upon me. So many little incidents were occurring in my favor, that I began to believe the fates pro-

pitious, and my hopes of success were growing stronger apace.

Just then the captive turned her head, and her face was toward me. There was no mark on that fair brow; that soft cheek was without a scar; the delicate skin was intact, smooth, and diaphanous as ever. The *herredero* had been merciful.

Perhaps something had occurred to interrupt or hinder him from his horrid work?

I prayed that the matador had met with a similar interruption! I could not tell—those profuse clusters covered all—neck, bosom and shoulders—all were hidden under the dark dishevelment. I could not tell, but I did not dare to hope. Cyprio had seen the blood!

It was but a momentary glance, and her face was again turned away.

At intervals she repeated it, and I saw that she looked in other directions. I could note the uneasiness of her manner; I could tell why those glances were given; I knew her design. Oh, for one word in her hearing—one whisper!

It might not be; she was too closely watched. Jealous eyes were upon her; savage hearts were gloating over her beauty. No word could have reached her that would not have been heard by others—by all around the fire—for the silence was profound. The "council" had not yet essayed to speak.

The stillness was at length broken by the voice of a crier, who in a shrill tone proclaimed that the "council was in session."

The name of "Hissoo-royo" pealed upon the air. The crier was calling him into court—another parallel with the customs of civilization!

Three times the name was pronounced, at each repetition in louder voice than before.

The man might have spared his breath; he who was summoned was upon the spot, and ready to answer.

Before the echo died away the renegade uttered a response, and stepping to an open space within the ring, halted, drew himself up to his full height, folded his arms, and in this attitude stood waiting.

At that crisis the thought occurred to me whether I should rush forward and at once decide the fate of myself and my betrothed. The seated warriors appeared to be all unarmed, and the renegade—whose hand I most regarded—was now further off, having gone round to the opposite side of the fire. The situation was favorable, and for a moment I stood straining upon the spring.

But my eye fell upon the spectators in the background. Many of them were directly in the way I should have to take. I saw that many of them carried weapons, either in their hands or upon their persons, and Hissoo-royo himself was still too near.

I could never fight my way against such odds. I could not break such a line—it would be madness to attempt it. Rube's counsel was again ringing in my ears, and once more I abandoned the rash design.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE WHITE-HAIRED CHIEF.

THERE was an interval of silence—a dramatic pause—that lasted for more than a minute.

It was ended by one of the council rising to his feet, and by a gesture inviting Hissoo-royo to speak.

The renegade began:

"Red warriors of the Hietan! brothers! what I have to say before the council will not require many words. I claim yonder Mexican girl as my captive, and therefore as my own. Who denies my right? I claim the white horse as mine—my prize fairly taken."

The speaker paused, as if to wait for further commands from the council.

"Hissoo-royo has spoken his claim to the Mexican maiden and the white steed. He has not said upon what right he rests it. Let him declare his right in the presence of the council!"

This was said by the same Indian who had made the gesture, and who appeared to direct the proceedings. He was not acting by any superior authority, which he may have possessed, but merely by reason of his being the oldest of the party. Among the Indians, age gives precedence.

"Brothers!" continued Hissoo-royo, in obedience to the command—"my claim is just—of that you are to be the judges; I know your true hearts—you will not shut them against justice. I need not read to you your own law, that he who makes a captive has the right to keep it—to do with it as he will. This is the law of your tribe—of my tribe as well, for yours is mine."

Grunts of approbation caused a momentary interruption in the speech.

"Hietans!" resumed the speaker, "my skin is white, but my heart is the color of your own. You did me the honor to adopt me into your nation; you honored me by making me first a warrior, and afterwards a war chief. Have I ever given you cause to regret what you have done? Have I ever betrayed your trust?"

A volley of exclamations indicated a response in the negative.

"I have confidence, then, in your love of jus-

"fice and truth; I have no fear that the color of my skin will blind your eyes, for you all know the color of my heart."

Fresh signs of approbation followed this adroit stroke of eloquence.

"Then, brothers! listen to my cause; I claim the maiden and the horse. I need not tell where they were found, and how; your own eyes were witnesses of their capture. There has been talk of a doubt as to who made it, for many horsemen were in the pursuit. I deny that there is any doubt. My lazo was first over the head of the horse—was first tightened around his throat—first brought him to a stand. To take the horse was to take the rider. It was my deed; both are my captives. I claim both as my property. Who is he that disputes my claim? Let him stand forth!"

Having delivered this challenge with a defiant emphasis, the speaker fell back into his former attitude; and, once more folding his arms, remained silent and immobile.

Another pause followed, which was again terminated by a sign from the old warrior who had first spoken. This gesture was directed to the crier, who the moment after, raising his shrill voice, called out:

"Wakono!"

The name caused me to start as if struck by an arrow. It was my own appellation; I was Wakono!

It was pronounced thrice, each time louder than the preceding:

"Wakono! Wakono! Wakono!"

A light flashed upon me. Wakono was the rival claimant! He whose breech-cloth was around my hips, whose robe hung from my shoulders, whose plumed bonnet adorned my head, whose pigments disfigured my face—he of the red hand upon his breast, and the cross upon his brow, was no other than Wakono!

I cannot describe the singular sensation I felt at this discovery. I was in a perilous position indeed. My fingers trembled among the leaves. I released the branchlets, and let them close up before my face; I dared not trust myself to look forth.

For some moments I stood still and silent, but not without trembling. I could not steady my nerves under such a dread agitation.

I listened, but looked not. There was an interval of breathless silence—no one seemed to stir or speak—they were waiting the effect of the summons.

Once more the voice of the crier was heard pronouncing in triple repetition: "Wakono! Wakono! Wakono!"

Again followed an interval of silence; but I could hear low mutterings of surprise and disappointment as soon as it was perceived that the Indian did not answer to his name.

I alone knew the reason of his absence; I knew that Wakono *could* not—the true Wakono; that his counterfeit *would* not come. Though I had undertaken to personate the savage chieftain, for this act in the drama I was not prepared. The stage must wait!

Even at that moment I was sensible of the ludicrousness of the situation; so extreme was it, that even at that moment of direst peril, I felt a half inclination for laughter!

But the feeling was easily checked; and once more parting the branches, I ventured to look forth.

I saw there was some confusion. Wakono had been reported "missing." The members of the council still preserved both their seats and stoical composure; but the younger warriors behind were uttering harsh ejaculations, and moving about from place to place with that restless air that betokens at once surprise and disappointment.

At this crisis, an Indian was seen emerging from the tent. He was a man of somewhat venerable aspect, though venerable more from age than any positive expression of virtue. His cheeks were furrowed by time, and his hair white as bleached flax—a rare sight among Indians.

There was something about this individual that bespoke him a person of authority. Wakono was the son of the chief—the chief, then, should be an old man. This must be he!

I had no doubt of it, and my conjecture proved to be correct.

The white-haired Indian stepped forward to the edge of the ring, and with a wave of his hand commanded silence.

The command was instantly obeyed. The murmurings ceased, and all placed themselves in fixed attitudes to listen.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SPEECHES IN COUNCIL.

"HIETANS!" began the chief, for such in reality was the old Indian, "my children, and brothers in council! I appeal to you to stay judgment in this matter. I am your chief, but I claim no consideration on that account; Wakono is my son, but for him I ask no favor; I demand only justice and right—such as would be given to the humblest in our tribe; I ask no more for my son Wakono."

"Wakono is a brave warrior; who among you does not know it? His shield is garnished with many trophies taken from the hated pale-face; his leggings are fringed with scalps of the Utah and Cheyenne; at his heels drag the long locks of the Pawnee and Arapaho. Who will deny that Wakono—my son Wakono—is a brave warrior?"

A murmur of assent was the response to this paternal appeal.

"The Spanish wolf, too, is a warrior—a brave warrior; I deny it not. He is stout of heart and strong of arm; he has taken many scalps from the enemies of the Hietan; I honor him for his achievements; who among us does not?"

A general chorus of "ughs" and other ejaculations from both council and spectators responded to this interrogatory. The response, both in tone and manner, was strongly in the affirmative; and I could tell by this that the renegade—not Wakono—was the favorite.

The old chief also perceived that such was prevailing sentiment; and despite his pretensions to fair play he was evidently nettled at the reply. The father of Wakono was undoubtedly no Brutus.

After a momentary pause, he resumed speech, but in a tone entirely altered. He was now painting the reverse side of his Hissoo-royo's portrait, and as he threw in the darker touches, it was with evident pique and hostility.

"I honor the Spanish wolf," he continued; "I honor him for his strong arm and his stout heart; I have said so; but hear me, Hietans—hear me, children and brothers! there are two of every kind—there is a night and a day—a winter and a summer—a green prairie and a desert plain, and like these is the tongue of Hissoo-royo. It speaks two ways that differ as the light from the darkness—it is double—it forks like the tongue of the rattle-serpent—it is not to be believed."

The chief ceased speaking, and the "Spanish wolf" was permitted to make reply.

He did not attempt to defend himself from the charge of the "double tongue;" perhaps he knew that the accusation was just enough, and he had no reason to tremble for his popularity on that score. He must have been a great liar, indeed, to have excelled or even equaled the most ordinary story-teller in the Comanche nation; for the mendacity of these Indians would have been a match for Sparta herself.

The renegade did not even deny the aspersion: he seemed to be confident in his case; he simply replied:

"If the tongue of Hissoo-royo is double, let not the council rely upon his words! let witnesses be called! there are many who are ready to testify to the truth of what Hissoo-royo has spoken."

"First hear Wakono! Let Wakono be heard! Where is Wakono?"

These demands were made by various members of the council, who spoke simultaneously.

Once more the crier's voice was heard calling "Wakono!"

"Brothers!" again spoke the chief: "it is for this I would stay your judgment. My son is not in the camp; he went back upon the trail, and has not returned. I know not his purpose. My heart is in doubt—but not in fear. Wakono is a strong warrior, and can take care of himself. He will not be long absent; he must soon return. For this I ask you to delay the judgment."

A murmur of disapprobation followed this avowal. The allies of the renegade evidently mustered stronger than the friends of the young chief.

Hissoo-royo once more addressed the council. "What trifling would this be, warriors of the Hietan? Two suns have gone down, and this question is not decided! I ask only justice. By our laws, the judgment cannot stand over. The captives must belong to some one. I claim them as mine, and I offer witnesses to prove my right. Wakono has no claim, else why is he not here to avow it? He has no proofs beyond his own word; he is ashamed to stand before you without proof—that is why he is now absent from the camp!"

"Wakono is not absent," cried a voice from among the bystanders; "he is in the camp!"

This announcement produced a sensation, and I could perceive that the old chief partook equally with the others of the surprise created.

"Who says Wakono is in the camp?" inquired he in a loud voice.

An Indian stepped forth from the crowd of spectators. I recognized the man, whom I had met crossing from the horse-guard.

"Wakono is in the camp," repeated he, as he paused outside the circle. "I saw the young chief; I spoke with him."

"When?"

"Only now."

"Where?"

The man pointed to the scene of our accidental rencontre.

"He was going yonder," said he; "he went among the trees—I saw him not after."

This intelligence evidently increased the astonishment. It could not be comprehended why

Wakono should be upon the ground, and yet not come forward to assert his claim. Had he abandoned it altogether?

The father of the claimant appeared as much puzzled as any one; he made no attempt to explain the absence of his son: he could not; he stood silent, and evidently in a state of mystification.

Several now suggested that a search be made for the absent warrior. It was proposed to send messengers throughout the camp—to search the grove.

My blood ran cold as I listened to the proposal; my knees trembled beneath me. I knew that if the grove was to be searched, I should have no chance of remaining longer concealed. The dress of Wakono was conspicuous; I saw that there was none other like it: no other wore a robe of jaguar-skins, and this would betray me. Even the paint would not avail; I should be led into the firelight; the counterfeit would be detected. I should be butchered upon the spot—perhaps tortured for the treatment we had given the true Wakono, which would soon become known.

My apprehension had reached the climax of acuteness, when they were suddenly relieved by some words from the Spanish wolf.

"Why search for Wakono?" cried he; "Wakono knows his own name; it has been called and loud enough. Wakono has ears—surely he can hear for himself, if he be in the camp. Call him again, if you will!"

This proposition appeared reasonable. It was adopted, and the crier once more summoned the young chief by name.

The voice, as all perceived, could have been heard to the furthest bounds of the camp, and far beyond.

An interval was allowed, during which there reigned perfect silence, every one bending his ears to listen.

There came no answer—no Wakono appeared to the summons.

"Now!" triumphantly exclaimed the renegade, "is it not as I have said? Warriors! I demand your judgment."

There was no immediate reply. A long pause followed, during which no one spoke, either in the circle or among the spectators.

At length the oldest of the council rose, relit the calumet, and, after taking a whiff from the tube, handed it to the Indian seated on his left. This one, in like manner, passed it to the next, and he to the next, until the pipe had made the circuit of the fire, and was returned to the old warrior who had first smoked from it.

The latter now laid aside the pipe, and in a formal manner, but in a voice inaudible to the spectators, proposed the question.

The vote was taken in rotation, and was also delivered *sotto voce*. The judgment only was pronounced aloud.

The decision was singular, and somewhat unexpected. The jury had been moved by a strong leaning toward equity, and an amicable adjustment that might prove acceptable to all parties.

The horse was adjudged to Wakono—the maiden was declared the property of the Spanish wolf!

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE ESCAPE.

THE decision appeared to give satisfaction to all. A grim smile upon his face testified that the renegade himself was pleased. How could he be otherwise? He had certainly the best of the suit—for what was a beautiful horse to a beautiful woman, and such a woman?

As soon as the sentence was pronounced, the Indians who had been seated rose to their feet. The council was dismissed.

After the council was over, no one interfered—no one seemingly took any interest either in the renegade or his pale-faced squaw; they were left to themselves.

And to me. From that moment my eyes and thoughts rested only on them; I saw no one else; I thought of nothing else; I watched but the "wolf" and his victim.

The old chief had retired into the tent. Isolina was left alone.

Only a moment alone. Had it been otherwise, I should have sprung forward. My fingers had moved mechanically toward my knife; but there was not time. In the next instant Hissoo-royo stood beside her.

He addressed her in Spanish; he did not desire the others to understand what was said. Speaking in this language, there would be less fear of them doing so.

There was one who listened to every word. I listened—not a syllable escaped me.

"Now!" began he, in an exulting tone—"Now, Dona Isolina de Vargas! you have heard? I know you understand the tongue in which the council has spoken—your native tongue. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have heard," was the reply, in a tone of resignation!

"And surely you are satisfied with the judgment?"

"I am satisfied."

"This was uttered in the same tone of resignation. The answer somewhat surprised me.

"'Tis a lie!" rejoined the brutal monster; "you are playing false with me, sweet senorita. But yesterday you spoke words of scorn—you would scorn me still?"

"I have no power to scorn you; I am your captive."

"*Currambo!* you speak truth. You have no power either to scorn or refuse me. Ha, ha, ha!"

I grasped the haft of my knife, and like a tiger stood cowering on the spring. My intent was, first to cut down the ruffian, and then set free the limbs of the captive with the blood-stained blade.

"Come!" exclaimed the renegade, speaking to his victim, and making sign for her to follow him—"Come, sweet senorita!"

I listened for the reply of Isolina; I watched her as well; I noted her every movement.

"How can I follow you?" she inquired, in a calm voice, and in a tone of surprise.

"True," said the man, turning back, and drawing the knife from his belt. "Carrai! I had not thought of that; but we shall soon—"

He did not finish the sentence; he stopped in the middle of it, and in an attitude that betokened hesitation.

In this attitude he remained a while, gazing into the eyes of his victim; then, as if suddenly changing his mind, he struck the knife back into its sheath, and at the same time cried out:

"By the Virgin! I shall not trust you. You are too free of limb, sweet *margarita!* you might try to give me the slip. This is a better plan. Come! raise yourself up—a little higher—so. Now we go—now for the grove. *Vamos!*"

While delivering the last words, the ruffian bent himself over the half-prostrate captive; and, placing his arm underneath, wound it around her waist.

The renegade, having raised the unresisting captive in his arms, proceeded to carry her from the spot. He scarcely carried her; her feet, naked and bound, trailed along the grass, both together.

Still keeping within the timber, I glided along its edge; with quick but noiseless step I went, making for the same point.

I arrived first; and, stooping under the shadow of the trees, waited, with knife in hand, arm grasped and ready.

His burden had delayed him; he had stopped midway to rest; and was now scarcely ten paces from the edge of the grove, with the girl still in his arms, and apparently leaning against him.

Only for a moment, and he had again taken up his burden and was moving toward me. He was making directly for the spot where I stood. The crisis was near!

It was even nearer than I thought. The man had scarcely made three steps from the point of rest, when I saw him stumble and fall to the earth, carrying the captive along with him!

The fall appeared accidental. I might have deemed it so, but for the wild shout with which it was accompanied. Something more than a mere stumble elicited that fearful cry.

There was a short struggle upon the ground—the bodies became separated. One was seen to spring suddenly back; I saw it was Isolina! There was something in her hand—both moonlight and firelight gleamed upon a crimsoned blade!

She who grasped it bent for an instant downward—its keen edge severed the thongs from her limbs, and the moment after, she was running in full flight across the level sward of the camp-ground!

Without reflection, I sprang out of the covert and rushed after.

The alarm was given—the camp was in commotion—fifty savages were starting upon the chase.

As we ran, my eyes fell upon a horse—a white horse. It was the steed; a man was leading him by a lazo. He was taking him from the fires toward the ground occupied by the mustangs; he was going to picket him on the grass.

Horse and man were directly in front of us as we ran—in front of the fugitive. She was making toward them; I divined her intention.

In a few seconds she was up to the horse, and had seized the rope.

The Indian struggled, and tried to take it away from her; the red blade gleamed in his eyes, and he gave back.

He still clung to the rope; but in an instant it was cut from his hands, and, quick as thought, the heroic woman leaped upon the back of the steed, and was seen galloping away!

The Indian was one of the horse-guards, and was therefore armed; he carried bow and quiver. Before the horse had galloped beyond reach, he had bent his bow, and sent an arrow from the string.

I heard the "whoop" of the shaft, and fancied I heard it strike; but the steed kept on!

I had plucked up one of the long spears, as I ran across the camp. Before the Indian could adjust another arrow to the string, I had thrust him in the back.

"I drew out the spear, and, keeping the white horse in view, ran on.

I was soon in the midst of the mustangs; many of them had already stampeded, and were galloping to and fro over the ground. The guards were dismayed, but as yet knew not the cause of the alarm. The steed with his rider passed safely through their line.

I followed on foot, and as fast as I could run. Fifty savages were after me; I could hear their shouts.

I could hear them cry "Wakono," but I was soon far in advance of all. The horse-guards, as I passed them, were shouting "Wakono!"

As soon as I had cleared the horse drove, I again perceived the steed; but he was now some distance off. To my joy he was going in the right direction—straight for the yuccas upon the hill. My men would see and intercept him!

I ran along the stream with all speed. I reached the broken bank, and, without stopping, rushed into the gully for my horse.

What was my astonishment to find that he was gone! my noble steed gone, and in his place the spotted mustang of the Indian!

I looked up and down the channel—I looked along its banks—Moro was not in sight!

I had no time to reflect—not a moment. I drew the animal from the water, and leaping upon his back, rode out of the channel.

As I regained the level of the plain, I saw mounted men, a crowd of them coming from the camp. They were the savages in pursuit; one was far ahead of the rest, and before I could turn my horse to flee, he was close up to me. In the moonlight I easily recognized him—it was Hissoo-royo, the renegade.

"Slave!" shouted he, speaking in the Comanche tongue, and with furious emphasis, "it is you who have planned this. Squaw! coward! you shall die! The white captive is mine—mine, Wakono! and you—"

He did not finish the sentence. In another instant the renegade and his horse were parted; the former lay leveled upon the grass, transfixed with the long spear, while the latter was galloping riderless over the plain!

At this crisis I perceived the crowd coming up, and close to the spot. There were twenty or more, and I saw that I should soon be surrounded.

A happy idea came opportunely to my relief. All along I had observed that I was mistaken for Wakono. The Indians in the camp had cried "Wakono;" the horse-guards shouted "Wakono" as I passed; the pursuers were calling "Wakono" as they rode up; the renegade had fallen with the name upon his lips; the spotted horse, the robe of jaguar-skins, the plumed head-dress, the red hand, the white cross, all proclaimed me Wakono!

I urged my horse a length or two forward, and reined up in front of the pursuers. I raised my arm and shook it in menace before their faces; at the same time I cried out in a loud voice:

"I am Wakono! Death to him who follows!"

I spoke in Comanche. I was not so sure of the correctness of my words—either of the pronunciation or the syntax—but I had the gratification to perceive that I was understood. Perhaps my gestures helped the savages to comprehend me—the meaning of these was not to be mistaken.

From whatever cause, the pursuers made no further advance; but one and all, drawing in their horses, halted upon the spot.

I stayed not for further parley; but, wheeling quickly round, galloped away from them, as fast as the mustang could carry me.

CHAPTER L.

THE LAST CHASE.

On facing toward the hill, I perceived the steed still not so distant. His white body, gleaming under the clear moonlight, could have been easily distinguished at a far greater distance. I had expected to see him much further away; but, after all, the tilt of lances, and the menace delivered to the pursuing horsemen, had scarcely occupied a score of seconds, and he could not in the time have gone out of sight.

He was still running between myself and the foot of the hill—apparently keeping along the bank of the stream.

I put the Indian horse to his full speed. The point of my knife served for whip and spur. I was no longer incumbered with the spear; it had been left in the body of Hissoo-royo.

I kept my eyes fixed upon the steed, but he was fast closing in to the timber that skirted the base of the hill; he was nearing the bend where I had taken to the water, and would soon be hidden from my view behind the bushes.

All at once I saw him swerve, and strike away to the left, across the open plain. To my surprise I saw this, for I had conjectured that his rider was aiming to reach the cover offered by the thicket.

Without waiting to think of an explanation,

I headed the mustang into the diagonal line, and galloped forward.

I was in hopes of getting nearer by the advantage thus given me; but I was ill satisfied with the creeping pace of the Indian horse, so unlike the long, free stretch of my matchless Moro. Where was he? Why was I not bestriding him?

The white steed soon shot clear of the hill, and was now running upon the plain that stretched beyond it.

I saw that I was not gaining upon him; on the contrary, he was every moment widening the distance between us. Where was Moro? Why had he been taken away?

At that instant I perceived a dark horseman making along the foot of the ridge, as if to intercept me; he was dashing furiously through the thicket that skirted the base of the declivity. I could hear the bushes rattling against the flanks of his horse; he was evidently making all the haste in his power, at the same time aiming to keep concealed from the view of those upon the plain.

I recognized my horse, and upon his back the thin lank form of the earless trapper!

We met the moment after, at the point where the thicket ended.

Without a word passing between us, both simultaneously flung ourselves to the ground, exchanged horses, and remounted. Thank Heaven! Moro was at last between my knees!

"Now, young fellow!" cried the trapper, as I parted from him, "gallop like h—, an kitch up with her! We'll soon be arter on y'ur trail—all right thur. Away!"

I needed no prompting from Rute; his speech was not finished, before I had sprung my horse forward, and was going like the wind.

It was only then that I could comprehend why the horses had been changed; a ruse it was—an after-thought of the cunning trappers!

Had I mounted my own conspicuous steed by the camp, the Indians would in all probability, have suspected something, and continued their pursuit; it was the spotted mustang that had enabled me to carry out the counterfeit!

I had now beneath me a horse I could depend upon! and with renewed vigor I lent myself to the chase. For the third time, the white and black stallions were to make trial of their speed—for the third time was it to be a struggle between these noble creatures.

Would the struggle be hard and long? Would Moro again be defeated? Such were my reflections as I swept onward in the pursuit.

I rode in silence. I scarcely drew breath, so keen were my apprehensions about the result.

A long start had the prairie-horse. My delay had thrown me far behind him—nearly a mile. But for the friendly light I should have lost sight of him altogether; but the plain was open, the moon shined brightly, and the snow-white form, like a meteor, beckoned me onward.

I had not galloped far before I perceived that I was rapidly gaining upon the steed. Surely he was not running at his fleetest? Surely he was going more slowly than was his wont?

Oh! could his rider but know who was coming after!—could she but hear me!

I would have called, but the distance was still too great. She could not have heard even my shouts; how then distinguish my voice?

I galloped on in silence. I was gaining—constantly, rapidly gaining. Surely I was drawing nearer! or were my eyes playing false under the light of the moon?

I fancied that the steed was running heavily—slowly and heavily—as if he was laboring in the race. I fancied—no, it was no fancy—I was sure of it! Beyond a doubt, he was not going at his swiftest speed!

What could it mean? Was he broken by fatigue?

Still nearer and nearer I came, until scarcely three hundred yards appeared between us. My shout might now be heard; my voice—

I called aloud; I called the name of my betrothed, coupling it with my own; but no answer came back—no sign of recognition to cheer me.

The ground that lay between us favored a race-course speed, and I was about putting my horse to his full stretch, when, to my astonishment, I saw the white steed stagger forward and fall headlong to the earth!

It did not check my career; and in a few seconds more I was upon the spot and halting over horse and rider, still prostrate.

I flung myself from the saddle just as Isolina disengaged herself and rose to her feet. With her right hand clasping the red knife she stood confronting me.

"Savage! approach me not!" she cried in the Comanche tongue, and with a gesture that told her determination.

"Isolina! I am not— It is—"

"Henri!"

No words interrupted that wild embrace; no sound could be heard save that made by our hearts, as they throbbed closely together.

Silently I stood upon the plain with my betrothed in my arms. Moro was by our side, proudly curving his neck and chafing the steel

between his foaming lips. At our feet lay the prairie-horse with the barb in his vitals and the feathered shaft protruding from his side. His eyes were fixed and glassy; blood still ran from his spread nostrils; but his beautiful limbs were motionless in death!

Horsemen were seen approaching the spot. We did not attempt to flee from them; I recognized my followers.

They came galloping up, and, drawing bridle, sat silent in their saddles.

We looked back over the plain. There was no sign of pursuit; but for all that we did not tarry there. We knew not how soon the Indians might be after us; the friends of Hissoroyo might yet come upon the trail of Wakono!

We scarce gave a parting look to that noble form stretched lifeless at our feet, but plying the spur rode rapidly away.

It was near daybreak when we halted to rest, and then only after the prairie had been fired behind us.

We found shelter in a pretty grove of acacias, and a grassy turf on which to repose. My wearied followers soon fell asleep.

I slept not; I watched over the slumbers of my betrothed. Her beautiful head rested upon my knees; her soft damask cheek was pillowed upon the robe of the jaguar-skins, and my eyes were upon it. The thick tresses had fallen aside, and I saw—

The matador, too, had been merciful! or had gold bribed him from his cruel intent? No matter which—he had failed in his fiendish duty.

There in full entirety were those delicate organs—perfect, complete. I saw but the trifling scar where the gold circlet had been rudely plucked—the source of that red hemorrhage that had been noticed by Cypriol!

I was too happy to sleep.

It was our last night upon the prairies. Before the setting of another sun we had crossed the Rio Grande and arrived in the camp of our army. Under the broad protecting wings of the American eagle my betrothed could repose in safety until that blissful hour when—

Of the Comanches we never heard more. The story of one only was afterward told—a fearful tale. Ill-fated Wakono! A horrid end was his.

An oft-told tale by the prairie camp-fire is that of the skeleton of an Indian warrior found clasping the trunk of a tree! Wakono had horribly perished.

We had no design of giving him such a fate. Without thought had we acted; and though he may have deserved death, we had not designed for him such terrible retribution.

Perhaps I was the only one who had any remorseful feeling; but the remembrance of that scalp-bedecked shield—the scenes in that Cyprian grove—those weeping captives, wedded to a woe-lot—the remembrance of these cruel realities evermore rose before my mind, stifling the remorse I should otherwise have felt for the doom of the ill-starred savage. His death, though terrible in kind, was merited by his deeds; and was perhaps as just as punishments usually are.

Poetical justice demands the death of Ijurra, and by the hand of Holingsworth. Truth enables me to satisfy the demand.

On my return to the camp, I learned that the act was already consummated—the brother's blood had been avenged!

It was a tragic tale, and would take many chapters in the telling. I may not give them here. Let a few particulars suffice.

From that dread night, Holingsworth had found a willing hand to aid him in his purpose of retribution—one who yearned for vengeance keenly as himself. Wheatley was the man.

The two, with a chosen party, had thrown themselves on the trail of the guerrilla; and with Pedro as their guide, had followed it far within the hostile lines. Like sleuth-hounds had they followed it night and day, until they succeeded in tracking the guerrilleros to their lair.

It was a desperate conflict—hand to hand, and knife to knife—but the rangers at length triumphed; most of the guerrilleros were slain, and the band nearly annihilated.

Ijurra fell by Holingsworth's own hand; while the death of the red ruffian El Zorro, by the bowie-knife of the Texan lieutenant, was an appropriate punishment for the cruelty inflicted upon Conchita. The revenge of both was complete, though both still bore the sorrow within their hearts.

The expedition of the two lieutenants was productive of other fruits. In the headquarters of the guerrilla they found many prisoners, Yankees and Ayankleados—among others, that rare diplomatist Don Ramon Vargas.

Of course the old gentleman was released from captivity; and had arrived at the American camp, just in time to welcome his fair daughter and future son-in-law from their grand ante-hymeneal "tour upon the prairies."

THE END.

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